

ROYAL JORDANIAN has the pleasure to announce a new check - in procedure, for **First and Super Business Class** passengers as of January 1st 1997. Complete departure formalities will be done at Terminal 1 on behalf of First and Business Class passengers, while they are relaxing at the CIP Lounge.

FBI ready to cooperate with Egypt in probe into letter bombs

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said Sunday that it was willing to cooperate with Egyptian authorities in the investigation of letter bombs sent to the United States with Egyptian postmarks.

But the agency declined to say whether it had dispatched a team of investigators to Egypt.

Earlier on Sunday, Fuad Hussein, Egyptian transport and communications police chief, said he was expecting an FBI team to arrive in the next few hours.

Meanwhile, the head of the Egyptian Interior Ministry's press department, General Rauf Al Manawi, categorically denied that the letter bombs "were sent from Egypt, from Alexandria... or from another part of the country."

"In spite of our conviction that such letters could not have been sent from Egypt, we and the security services must verify and pursue" this matter, Gen. Manawi was quoted by the Egyptian news agency MENA as saying.

On Saturday, an Egyptian postal official said that the postal service had asked the U.S. embassy in Cairo to send the letter bomb envelopes to verify if the stamps were genuine or faked.

All mail sent abroad from Egypt is brought to a central office in Cairo for detailed inspection using sophisticated detection equipment, the official said.

"It's difficult to believe therefore that these letter bombs were really sent from Alexandria," the official said.

U.S. State Department Spokesman Nicholas Burns said Friday that Washington had contacted the Egyptian government and had "its full cooperation".

The State Department has also advised its embassies and consulates abroad to review their security measures, particularly mail and package screening procedures, Mr. Burns said.

The FBI discovered four letter bombs at the Washington bureau of Al Hayat, which has its head office in London. Another that was to have been delivered to the paper was later found at a Washington Post office.

Two devices were found Thursday, followed by a third Friday, at Leavenworth, where Mohammed Salameh is serving a 240-year sentence in connection with the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York.

But authorities have declined to speculate on a link between the presence of Salameh and the letter-bomb campaign.



UNSEASONALLY HOT: Bathers dive from rocks into the sea off Beirut on Monday as the Lebanese capital continues to bask in unseasonably hot weather. Beirut basked in a balmy 22 degrees Centigrade while the snow-capped peaks of surrounding mountains could be seen from the seafloor (Reuters photo)

Turkey renews protests over Cyprus missiles

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey renewed its protests Monday over a purchase of a Russian air defence system by Cyprus and warned the Greek-Cypriot authorities against starting an arms race on the divided island.

The Foreign Ministry warned the Greek-Cypriot government of Cyprus "against any attempt to drag Cyprus into an adventure which could have hazardous results."

"Turkey considers that over-arming by the Greek-Cypriot side constitutes a threat to the climate of peace in Cyprus and has a negative effect on efforts aimed at finding a solution" to the Cyprus problem, the ministry said.

"It is clear that Turkey will not tolerate any development which would put the security of the Turkish community in Cyprus in danger and constitute a threat to its military capabilities," it said in a statement.

"It will also not tolerate any efforts aimed at disturbing the Turkey-Greece (military) equilibrium in the eastern Mediterranean," the statement said.

The Foreign Ministry said Ankara would "take the necessary measures" but did not elaborate.

The Cyprus News Agency (CNA) reported on Saturday that the Greek-Cypriot-led Cyprus government had concluded

a deal to buy S-300 anti-aircraft missiles from Russia despite opposition to the purchase from Turkey.

CNA said the contract for the air defence system had been concluded with the state-owned Russian company Rosvooruzhenie, but did not say how many missiles were being purchased or when they would be delivered.

A Cypriot official who requested anonymity told AFP in Nicosia on Sunday that the deal involved the purchase of some 20 missiles and they would not be delivered for another six to eight months.

The purchase of the air defence system comes amid a rise in tensions on Cyprus over the past six months and stalemated efforts by the U.N., Britain and United States to bring about reunification.

Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş warned Friday of the possibility of war. "The current tendency in Cyprus is toward a war, not unification," Mr. Denktaş said.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkish troops occupied the island's northern third following a right-wing coup in Nicosia aimed at unification with Greece.

The Turkish Cypriots created their own state in 1983, but it has been recognised only by Ankara, which has nearly 35,000 troops in the Turkish sector.

UAE men to visit Iraq with relief shipment

DUBAI (Agencies) — Ten men from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will set sail for Iraq on Tuesday to deliver 32 tonnes of milk and medicine to help ease the suffering of Iraqi children under U.N. sanctions.

It would be the first such visit since Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait strained Iraq's ties with the UAE, organisers said.

The trip to the southern Iraqi port of Um Qasr follows a November appeal by UAE President Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan for reconciliation with Iraq.

"We are not looking at any (political) factors as our eyes are focused only on the suffering of Iraqi children," Mohammed Ben Abdullah Ben Shabib, one of the organisers, told Reuters.

He said the organisers were a group of friends, mostly bankers and businessmen.

"We bear all the time and read in the newspapers that Iraqi children are dying every day because of lack of food and medicine," Mr. Ben Shabib said. "Hence we decided to embark on the first friendship trip" and to organise more trips in the future after we gather facts on the situation of children in Iraq from hospitals and officials during this visit."

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in November that 4,500 children were dying each month in Iraq from hunger and disease.

Sheikh Mohammad Ben Rashid Al Maktoum, crown prince of the UAE and the UAE's defence minister, donated humanitarian supplies worth 1.5 million dirhams (\$410,000) to the initiative, Mr. Ben Shabib said.

He said his group was also banking on pledges of support from local food merchants and the start of the fasting month of Ramadan next week to raise future donations.

The trucks from the non-government organisation Equilibre arrived from Baghdad Monday carrying \$200,000 worth of food and medicine for Iraqi children, the organisation said.

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It was the first time that a French non-government organisation travelled to Iraq to distribute food and medicine to Iraqi children.

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The supplies carried by the convoy, which includes teams from the organisation's headquarters in Lyon as well as Geneva in Switzerland, were worth more than one million francs (\$200,000).

Palestinians in Lebanon protest cut in UNRWA assistance

SIDON (AFP) — Palestinians in refugee camps across Lebanon observed a one-day strike on Monday, the fourth such protest in a month against the decrease of aid granted by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Businesses, shops, schools and medical dispensaries remained closed in shantytowns in Beirut as well as in southern, northern and eastern Lebanon.

Young men burnt tyres at the entrances of the camp of 'Ain Al Hilweh on the outskirts of the southern port city of Sidon and prevented cars and pedestrians from entering or leaving the camp.

A statement by the popular committees, which group all Palestinian factions and run the internal affairs of the camps, denounced the "educational and health crimes carried out by the UNRWA against our people."

The committees accused the UNRWA "giving up its humanitarian role and credibility" and called for an uprising against the agency's relief workers, comparing them to Israeli settlers in the occupied territories.

"The plot is one: in the occupied territories we are dying by the bullets of the Zionist settlers and here we are dying at the doors of the hospitals," said the statement.

They were protesting the ever-decreasing aid of the UNRWA, which is in financial crisis, to the refugees, particularly in the health and education fields, over the past few years.

Since the beginning of December, the Palestinian camps in South Lebanon have staged three sit-ins to protest against the deterioration of living conditions at the camps.

The more than 346,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon mostly work in plantations and on construction sites near their camps. They are generally paid less than the minimum monthly salary of \$190.

They do not have the right to state health care, are not granted work permits and cannot obtain government jobs according to a law adopted during President Amin Gemayel's term (1982-1988).

NEWS IN BRIEF

Egypt denies Mubarak assassination bid

CAIRO (AFP) — The Egyptian Interior Ministry has denied that there was an assassination attempt on President Hosni Mubarak in November in the northern city of Alexandria, in a statement to be published Monday. Information that there had been an attack against Mr. Mubarak at the presidential palace of Al Mutazah in Alexandria was "baseless," Al Ahram newspaper quotes the ministry as saying. An Arab diplomatic source in Nicosia said Saturday that a militant attack on the president on Nov. 29 in Alexandria was thwarted several hours before it was to have been carried out. "A group of 10 militants from the clandestine Jihad organisation had been arrested with a significant amount of automatic weapons and explosive devices just before attacking the presidential palace of Al Mutazah where President Mubarak was staying," the source said.

Turkish leftist surrenders in Syria

ANKARA (R) — A Turkish leftist wanted for the killing last year of a leading businessman has surrendered to Turkey's embassy in Damascus and been brought back to Istanbul, the Turkish press said on Monday. The Sabah newspaper said Mustafa Duyar, a member of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C), turned up at the embassy around two weeks ago and admitted killing businessman Ozdemir Sabanci and two others in an attack. Other papers had similar stories. The state-run Anatolian news agency quoted Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller as saying that Duyar had been arrested but she gave few details. The papers said members of the national intelligence service had travelled to the Syrian capital and brought Duyar to Ankara and then Istanbul where they handed him over to anti-terror police. Sabanci, head of the Toyotasa joint venture with Japan and a member of one of the country's top industrial dynasties, was shot dead in the company's headquarters in Istanbul last Jan. 9 along with Toyotasa's general manager and a secretary. DHKP-C, Turkey's most lethal armed leftist group, took responsibility for the killings. The press did not say why Duyar, who it quoted as feeling remorse over the attack, was in neighbouring Syria.

Israelis disappointed in mass UFO vigil

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israelis gazed in vain at the heavens Sunday night after a self-styled extra-lucid had predicted the arrival of flying saucers. Israeli television said hundreds of people all over the country had gone out on rooftops and to other observation posts to await the UFOs but none turned up. UFOlogy has many adepts in Israel which in December hosted an international congress on unidentified flying objects (UFOs) in the Red Sea resort of Eilat.

Saudi murder convict beheaded

RIYADH (AFP) — A Saudi man was beheaded here in public on Monday after he was found guilty of shooting to death a compatriot for mocking him, the Interior Ministry said. He was the third person executed in the kingdom this year. Saudi Arabia, which is governed by Islamic Law, applies the death penalty in cases of murder, rape, armed robbery and drug trafficking. It executed 68 people last year and a record 191 people in 1995. After China, Saudi Arabia ranks second in the world for its number of executions. Nigeria holds third place and the United States fourth place, according to the U.S. National Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty.

30 Kurdish rebels, 1 soldier killed

ANKARA (AFP) — Thirty Kurdish rebels and one Turkish soldier were killed in government military operations in southeastern Turkey at the weekend, officials said Monday. The operations were launched overnight Saturday against separatist Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) rebels hiding out in Sinak province near Turkey's borders with Syria and Iraq, said a communique from the government's regional headquarters in Diyarbakir. Sinak's 2,000 metre Mount Cudi is the Kurds' main access route to northern Iraq. The Turkish army launched an air and ground operation a week ago in the Sinak region of northern Iraq, leaving more than 160 rebels dead, according to an unofficial toll. The military said the incursion was prompted by PKK artillery fire against Turkish border units near Siopi, a few kilometres from Iraqi territory.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:05 Budgie (The Little Helicopter)
14:20 Captain Planet
14:30 Comedy — 1 Love Lucy
15:00 Sciences Cartoon
15:15 Magazine — Montagne
16:00 At The Zoo
16:30 Dog House
17:00 News Flash
17:02 Fun With Physics
17:15 Drama — Cyclone Tracy
18:00 Serie — La Lumiere des Justes
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Magazine — Extra Large
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Murphy Brown
20:00 Superstars of Action
20:30 Encounter
21:10 Doc. — The Lost Civilization
22:00 News in English
22:25 Snowy River
23:30 Mission Impossible

PRAYER TIMES

05:10 Fajr
06:32 Sunrise
11:42 Dhuhur
14:28 Asr
16:51 Maghreb
18:13 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweilish, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church

Tel. 632785.

St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366

Anglican Church Tel. 652826.

Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.

Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.

St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.

Amman International Church Tel. 652526

Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328.

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457

The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932.

Church of Nazarene Tel. 675691.

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

It will be partly cloudy with chances of scattered rains.

Winds will be southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba it will be hot with winds northerly moderate and the seas calm.

Amman 09/16

Aqaba 11/24

Deserts 09/17

Jordan Valley 10/22

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 17, Aqaba 24 Humidity readings: Amman 35 per cent, Aqaba 30 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Naser Ibrahim 830432

Dr. Mired Al Ghoul 790730

Dr. Bahjat Bader 832642

Dr. Yahya Abdul Rahim 736072

Ferdows pharmacy 778336

Al Asema pharmacy 637055

Al Salam pharmacy 636730

Yacoub pharmacy 644945

Shmeisani pharmacy 637660

Nairokh pharmacy 623672

Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:

Dr. Ghazi Ta'ameh 250080

Al Quds pharmacy (—)

ZARQA:

Dr. Khalil Abu Hasan 985019

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111

Civil Defence Dept 661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777

Fire Brigade 617101

Blood Bank 775121

Highway Police 843402

Traffic Police 896390

Public Security Department 630321

Hotel Complaints 605800

Price Complaints 661176

Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467

Amman Municipality Complaints 787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 010230

Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101

Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101

Jordan Television 773111

Radio Jordan 774111

Water Authority 680100

Jordan Electricity Authority 815615

Electric Power Company 636381

RJ Flight Information 0853200

Queen Alia Int'l. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

Hussein Medical Centre 813813/32

Khalidi Maternity 644281/6

Alkileh Maternity 642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity 0725

Malhas, J. Amman 636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 607071

Shmeisani Hospital 669131

University Hospital 845845

Al-Munshar Hospital 667227/9

The Islamic, Abdali 666126/37

Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3

Al-Bashir 775111/26

Army, Marika 891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50

Amal Hospital 674155

The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 865199

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323

Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560

Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732

Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555

Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275

Ibn Al Nafes Hospital (02)247100

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA AIRPORT

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

06:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

06:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

06:30 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

07:15 Sanaa (RJ)

07:25 Damascus (RJ)

09:25 Abu Dhabi (RJ)

09:30 Aqaba (add) (RJ)

10:05 Muscat, Dubai (RJ)

10:05 Beirut (RJ)

10:15 Doha, Bahrain (RJ)

15:55 London (RJ)

16:20 Cairo (RJ)

16:35 Frankfurt (RJ)

17:15 Chicago, Amsterdam (RJ)

23:30 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

05:05 Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

07:30 London (KJ)

07:35 Damascus, London (BA)

11:30 Cairo (MS)

15:00 Kiev (6U)

15:45 Munich (YP)

17:40 Rome (AZ)

19:15 Dubai (EK)

22:50 Tel Aviv (LY)

00:40 Beirut, Amsterdam (KL)

Yugoslav army chief indirectly backs democracy movement

BELGRADE (R) — The Yugoslav army commander met students in the Serbian opposition movement Monday and indirectly backed its campaign to restore opposition election victories annulled by the government.

After seven weeks of street protests that have rocked the autocratic rule of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic the West has told him to democratise Yugoslavia or face international isolation.

Sympathy for the students' cause from General Momcilo Perisic, chief of the Yugoslav Army General Staff, was the latest gesture of solidarity for opposition activists from members of the Serbian establishment.

Gen. Perisic told them that under the constitution the army stayed out of politics.

But he said he favoured a democratic solution to the crisis that would help Yugoslavia rejoin Europe.

"General Perisic underlined the Yugoslav army's ... special interest in seeing that all current problems are overcome within the legal institutions of the system in a manner deployed in democratic countries," an army statement issued by the official news agency Tanjug said.

Such an approach was necessary to secure Yugoslavia's reentry to the international community, it said.

Last October the United Nations repealed sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia in 1992 for its fomentation of war in Bosnia.

But the West is looking for democratic and free-market reforms in Yugoslavia before it funnels in money sought by Mr. Milosevic to reconstruct its wrecked economy and readmits Belgrade to key international institutions.

The army's message was couched to avoid open endorsement of the opposition Zajedno (Together) Coalition. But it effectively criticised Mr. Milosevic's annulment of the elections by demanding respect for international democratic norms.

An inquiry by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) verified opposition claims to have won voting in 15 of Serbia's 18 largest cities including Belgrade.

Serbia's Socialist (SPS) government grudgingly admitted last week that Zajedno prevailed in a few of the smaller cities but insisted that in other districts no party gained a majority or the results were inconclusive and needed further study.

Cedomir Jovanovic, spokesman for the five-member student delegation that met Gen. Perisic for 30 minutes, said the general bolstered the opposition's campaign by calling for the rule of law to be observed in Serbia.

"We have found ourselves on the same side since both they and we demand that the constitution be observed," Mr. Jovanovic told independent Belgrade Radio B-92.

Dusan Vasiljevic, another student leader, said Gen. Perisic promised there would be "no repeat of 1991" when Mr. Milosevic ordered tanks into Belgrade to crush an outbreak

of demonstrations for democratic change.

Mr. Milosevic alienated the army by summarily purging scores of generals and running down the ranks after army forces failed to prevent Croatia's secession from federal Yugoslavia in 1991.

Last week, unidentified army officers warned Mr. Milosevic after he unleashed riot police to beat demonstrators that army troops would not fire on protesters again.

The opposition movement has also garnered sympathy from the Serbian Orthodox Church and disgruntled elements of the police whose standard of living has plunged like most Yugoslavs.

Zajedno outfoxed a ban on marches Sunday by staging a vast traffic jam of hooting cars in central Belgrade, allowing more than 100,000 Zajedno supporters to flood the streets on foot.

Demonstrators planned to gather Monday evening in Republic Square and then march to St. Sava's Cathedral for midnight mass. The Serbian Orthodox Church celebrates Christmas on Jan. 7 according to the old Julian calendar.

Meanwhile, Bosnian Serb leaders called Monday on their erstwhile champion, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, to recognise immediately the results of disputed local elections in Serbia in which the opposition made sweeping gains.

In a hard-hitting pronouncement on the seven-week standoff between opposition protesters and Mr. Milosevic's government, the Bosnian Serb entity urged the Serbian leader to reinstate the opposition gains in the November polls so as to avoid bloodshed.

"It is stupid to stubbornly refuse to recognise what the laws of civilisation dictate," said Aleksa Buha, head of the ruling Bosnian Serb Party, as quoted by the Bosnian Serb News Agency (SRNA).

"Whatever the authorities think of the (opposition) Together Coalition, the choice of the people is the choice of God," Mr. Buha said in a message addressed to Orthodox Christians on the eve of Orthodox Christmas.

The Bosnian Serbs, once Mr. Milosevic's trusted proxy in Bosnia, have long since distanced themselves from their Belgrade patron, who they blame for foisting an "unjust" peace settlement on Bosnia.

In another reaction to the ongoing Serbian standoff, opposition leader Vesna Pesic told the French daily Le Monde she believed a solution to the crisis was close at hand because Mr. Milosevic had few other choices.

"I believe we will soon get a solution because President Milosevic is not so irrational as to refuse to accept the results of a commission which he himself invited," Ms. Pesic said, referring to the OSCE mediation team which called on Mr. Milosevic to recognise the opposition wins.

"If he does (refuse), he would find himself completely isolated diplomatically," she added.



Members of the Rustenburg Muslim community inspect the damage at a mosque where one of three bombs exploded near Johannesburg Sunday. The attack was the second incident in two weeks involving suspected white right-wingers. Police have arrested two white men in connection with Sunday's three bomb blasts (Reuters photo)

Far-right group claims S. African bombs

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — A shadowy extreme-right group has claimed responsibility for three bomb attacks in the mining region of Rustenburg northwest of here, the South African Press Agency (SAPA) reported Monday.

The claim was made in a telephone call to national television by a man speaking in an Afrikaans accent who said he represented the Boere Aanstrengings (Boer Stormtroopers or BAT).

In the statement, he said BAT recognised Nelson Mandela as president of South Africa and had nothing against blacks, but demanded that all Indians be removed from parliament.

BAT did not recognise Indians as indigenous people, labelling them "the

anti-Christ because they did not accept Jesus Christ," SAPA added, quoting the statement.

The Boer Stormtroopers had earlier claimed responsibility for two pipe bomb attacks in a crowded shopping centre in Worcester, near Cape Town, on Christmas Eve which killed three children and an adult and injured 60.

Police then said they were looking for three escaped right wing convicts who had broken out of prison in March last year while on trial for a string of bombings shortly before the historic all-race elections of April 1994.

The first explosion Sunday took place shortly after midnight at a mosque in the suburb of Ziniaville and slightly injured two night watchmen.

The second bomb exploded at a post office some 30 kilometres from Rustenburg, while the third explosion, later in the night, targeted a department store in the outskirts of the town.

Two people were injured in the blasts early Sunday, which also caused widespread damage.

Two white men were arrested at a road block in the region. Christiaan Harmse, 26, and Pierre Jacobs, 31, were remanded in custody for a week so police could continue their inquiries.

Police are treating the claim of responsibility seriously. The group had not been heard of publicly before claiming the Christmas Eve bombs but says it represents the Boer community.

In their statement over the Dec. 24 blasts, they said the attacks would continue until

certain demands were met, including the release from prison of far-right prisoners.

The three escaped convicts were all members of the Afrikaaner Resistance Movement (AWB) of Eugene Terre Blanche.

He denied the two men arrested at Rustenburg were also AWB members, but admitted some of BAT's goals coincided with its own. "If President Mandela wants to change the battlefield in a land of peace, we must talk about the releasing of my people," he said in an interview that was published Monday in the Beeld newspaper.

Mr. Mandela's ruling African National Congress called the attacks an affront "to the entire peace-loving people of our country," and urged people not to panic in the face of such barbaric provocation.

Central African capital calm as mediators expected to arrive

BANGUI (AFP) — Bangui

was calm Monday morning a day after fierce clashes between rebel soldiers and French troops backing loyalist forces, as the troubled Central African Republic awaited the arrival of African mediators seeking a solution to the crisis.

French troops and forces loyal to Central African President Ange-Felix Patasse remained in control of Bangui Monday, after storming a number of positions and districts held by mutinous soldiers since mid-November.

No shots have been heard since Sunday's fighting in which 10 rebel soldiers were killed, according to French officers. Government forces were still controlling access to central Bangui Monday, while traffic circulated as normal once again in districts formerly held by the mutineers.

Officials were waiting for the arrival of the African mediation team, which is to be led by Malian General Amadou Toumani Touré and will include Gabonese Defence Minister General Idriss Ngari.

The mediators were seeking a definitive solution to the Central African Republic's troubles, which flared three times last year as mutinous soldiers rose up to oust Mr. Patasse's government after an initial protest over pay arrears.

The heavily-armed French forces in the republic launched the onslaught Sunday after two French Navy commandos were

killed in the capital. They took control of the rebels' command post in the suburb of Peto and drove mutinous forces from several other positions in the town.

In addition to the fatalities, some 52 rebels were taken prisoner during the operation, but mutiny leader Anicet Saulet was not among them, French military sources said.

Some of the mutineers are believed to have melted into the civilian population, but sources in Bangui said that others could have crossed into neighbouring Zaire.

Most of the rebels however remain shut in Bangui's main barracks in the eastern part of the town. The camp was bombarded by heavy guns and helicopters, but French forces did not enter the facility, settling instead for sealing the barracks off.

France, which boosted its 2,000-strong presence in the troubled republic with the dispatch of a further 300 troops Sunday, has stressed that its actions in Bangui are aimed at supporting democracy and protecting French nationals in the country.

But in Paris Monday, protesters occupied the republic's embassy to protest what they described as French military intervention in the internal affairs of the former French colony.

In a statement Monday, the dozen embassy urged "the immediate withdrawal of troops of the French colonial occupation," called on Mr. Patasse to resign, and urged the United Nations to send a neutral force to help shore up peace and

national reconciliation.

French Socialist leader Lionel Jospin meanwhile warned the French government from getting sucked into an internal conflict.

"Of course, our forces should watch out for their own security," Mr. Jospin said, but added that he feared for "a rise in the powerful anti-French feeling in the Central African Republic."

He said Mr. Patasse had not behaved in a democratic fashion and had failed to stabilise the situation in his country.

"A political solution must be found if we are to avoid the perpetuation of old-style interventionism and the risk of becoming sucked into a military imbroglio," Mr. Jospin said.

But the French intervention appears to have ended seven weeks of rebellion against Mr. Patasse — elected president in October 1993 — in which rebel troops took control of key barracks and demanded the president resign.

The rebellion was the third within a year and motivated by both pay arrears and ethnic politics, African specialists say.

Most of the rebels of the Yakoma ethnic group, Yakoma residents of areas taken from the rebels Sunday were fleeing the districts, fearing reprisals against them by troops loyal to Mr. Patasse. Sources in Paris said later that the rebels had called for a resumption of negotiations following Sunday's clashes.

Sri Lankan troops open new front against rebels

COLOMBO (AFP) —

Hundreds of airborne troops launched a fresh offensive against Tamil Tiger guerrillas Monday and opened a new front amid rising rebel attacks in eastern Sri Lanka, officials said.

Four groups of elite army units were fanning out on a search-and-destroy mission against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) along two highways leading to the coastal town of Batticaloa, officials said.

"Soldiers are moving in small groups to ambush and confront the Tigers," a local official said by telephone. "Commando units have been deployed deep inside jungles for this operation."

The latest military drive code-named "Rivijaya Two" was mounted two days after the air force destroyed a training facility of the Tiger guerrillas in the area.

There were no immediate reports of confrontations in the latest operation.

Air force bombers smashed the training base of the LTTE Saturday and killed 15 rebels and wounded another 18, officials said.

Within hours of the attack, the Tigers moved to retaliate in the same district by ambushing a crowded military bus with a powerful land mine. Nineteen soldiers were wounded.

The Tiger guerrillas escalated their attacks in the east following an offensive the security forces conducted in the eastern jungles and claimed to have killed 19 rebels on New Year's Day.

The LTTE is leading a drawn out campaign for independence in the island's northern and eastern regions where the two million Tamil minority is concentrated.

More than 50,000 people have been killed in fighting in the past 24 years.

Suspected IRA rebels rocket Belfast court

BELFAST (R) — Suspected

Irish Republican guerrillas fired a rocket at the Belfast High Court Monday, injuring a police officer.

Security sources said the blast was caused by a primitive device launched at a joint army and police checkpoint near the heavily protected buildings in the centre of the Northern Ireland capital.

"It looks like some sort of rocket attack," a senior police officer at the scene said.

One officer needed medical treatment after the attack, security sources said.

Shoppers in a nearby street saw a man get out of a car and launch a rocket at the security post before driving off.

A car was later found on fire in a nearby street, a usual guerrilla tactic to destroy any forensic traces.

Bomb disposal officers combed the area and police sources said the remains of a missile had been found.

John Hunter, a lawyer in court at the time, said: "I heard a bomb go off, there was momentary shock. We all realised it was a bomb."

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but security sources said the attack carried all the hallmarks of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which is fighting to end British rule of Northern Ireland to reunite it with the Irish Republic.

On New Year's Eve, the IRA said it had abandoned a van carrying a landmine in the grounds of Belfast Castle. Tight security had prevented them from reaching their intended target.

The IRA has regularly attacked members of the 12,000-strong Royal Ulster Constabulary and Britain's 18,000 troops in the province during its 25-year fight against British rule.

Last Oct. 7, guerrillas penetrated Britain's army headquarters in Lisburn, near Belfast, and exploded two car bombs, killing one soldier and injuring 30.

The IRA ended a 17-month ceasefire last February. The organisation is demanding admission of its political arm, Sinn Fein, to current multiparty peace talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

Britain and the Irish Republic, co-sponsors of the talks, say Sinn Fein can only take part when the IRA has called a permanent end to its guerrilla war.

Meanwhile, Northern Ireland's pro-Irish parties, Sinn Fein and the SDLP, said Monday they could not agree an election pact, a failure that may boost the poll performance of their pro-British Unionist rivals.

Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein, political wing of IRA guerrillas, said that his hopes of an accord with the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) of John Hume had broken down and the two Catholic-backed groups would now compete with each other.

"The debate may go on in public, but the possibility of getting a pact together is finished," Mr. Adams told Northern Ireland Radio after Mr. Hume laid down tough conditions for a deal.

"I am disappointed no arrangement is possible on a viable strategy, but we will both in our own way do our best to maximise and consolidate our own party political standing."

Irish nationalists believe that a joint strategy to contest the British general election, which must be held by May, would give them three or four more seats in the British parliament, cutting into Unionist dominance there.

At present there are four SDLP members in the House of Commons, and a total of 13 Unionists, who want the province to remain part of Britain and are opposed to any dilution of its sovereignty.

Sinn Fein has no seats. Its official policy is to boycott the British parliament because it entails an oath of allegiance to Britain, which it sees as an illegal colonial ruler.

H. Kong warned against trying to change China

HONG KONG (R) — Lord

Howe, Britain's foreign minister at the time of the drafting of a treaty on the handover of Hong Kong to China, warned the British colony Monday against trying to trigger political change on the mainland.

He also urged Hong Kong's politically divided community to forge consensus.

"If Hong Kong tries, which I don't think it will, to make itself a bridgehead for revolutionary change in China, it will risk doing great damage to itself," Lord Howe, foreign secretary in former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government when the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong was signed in 1984.

Lord Howe said the terms of the joint declaration cut both ways.

Britain has promised to end over a century and a half of colonial rule and return Hong Kong to China at midnight on June 30, 1997, now just 176 days away.

China in return promised considerable autonomy for the people of Hong Kong under a "one country, two systems" principle by which capitalism would continue to prevail and socialism would not be imposed on the prosperous territory of six million.

"Hong Kong is certainly entitled to have all its traditional way of life, its bill of rights, its legal protection through rule of law upheld without interference from the mainland," Lord Howe said in an interview with Radio Hong Kong.

"The mainland is also entitled to say we can remain free of interference from Hong Kong."

Lord Howe declined to get drawn into the bitter dispute dividing Hong Kong in the delicate countdown period to the transition.

Hong Kong's Democrats are up in arms over China's plans to dismantle the colony's elected legislature and replace it with an

appointed provisional body.

The Democratic Party, the largest in the legislature, and its allies will be kicked out of the chamber when the provisional legislature is installed, undoing at a stroke electoral reforms introduced by the British to China's fury.

Democratic Party leaders have threatened to challenge the Provisional Legislature's constitutional right to exist, forcing it to plan to hold its meetings across the border in China.

"There has to be a coming together of Hong Kong leaders if Hong Kong is to be governed by Hong Kong," Lord Howe said.

The outgoing British colonial administration has refused all cooperation with the Provisional Legislature but has pledged to assist Hong Kong's leader-designate, Tung Chee-Hwa.

Mr. Tung, selected overwhelmingly by a China-assembly panel last month, held working-level talks in Beijing this weekend with Chinese officials responsible for the transition.

He did not disclose details of discussions concerning legality or otherwise of the chamber but said Beijing had agreed to foot the bill for the Provisional Legislature for the months leading up to the reversion of sovereignty.

China would seek reimbursement from the post-colonial government, Mr. Tung told reporters in Beijing Sunday.

Mr. Tung said he would formulate a budget to cover the activities of the provisional legislature once he had chosen his "team-designate," or the inner circles of Hong Kong's future administration.

So far, Mr. Tung has invited only Hong Kong's popular and influential top civil servant Anson Chan to remain in her post and serve as his number two. He said he did not need Beijing's approval to make appointments.

Mr. Tung will continue to meet senior civil servants this week.

Sweden's popular Prince Bertil dies

STOCKHOLM (R) — Sweden's Prince Bertil, who kept his romance with a divorced actress secret for 33 years to avoid a scandal, died Sunday at the age of 84.

The royal palace said Prince Bertil, who was the uncle of King Carl XVI Gustaf and fourth in line to the Swedish throne, died in his sleep at his Stockholm home after a lengthy illness.

Regarded as the grand old man of the royal family and immensely popular in Sweden, Prince Bertil was the son of King Gustaf Adolf VI, who died in 1973.

For 33 years he kept his relationship with divorced British actress Lilian Craig a secret to avoid a scandal that could have damaged the monarchy while the present king was a child.

The two met during World War II in

London but they only married in 1976. Prince Bertil could have lost his title by marrying a commoner and risked plunging Swedish royalty into chaos.

The court said in a statement: "Prince Bertil had been treated for several years for heart and lung problems. Recently his condition had gradually deteriorated. Prince Bertil died quietly and peacefully in his own home."

Prince Bertil was a keen sportsman and introduced the French game of boules to Sweden, he had a second home in the south of France.

Prime Minister Goran Persson paid tribute to Prince Bertil's contribution to Swedish sport and to the dozens of trade delegations he led around the world over more than 30 years.

...where one of three bombs exploded...
...ree bomb blasts (Reuters photo)

African bombs

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Two Spanish men try to pull a car out of a snow covered ditch Sunday. Freezing weather from northern Europe reached Spain over the last few days causing traffic problems around the country especially in the north (Reuters photo)

Big freeze kills more over weekend in Europe

PARIS (AFP) — The big freeze across Europe and beyond — which has cost more than 260 lives — claimed more victims Sunday, but relief was on hand for many road and rail travellers — as well as prospects for warmer weather later in the week.

Forecasters in Toulouse, southwest France, said France could expect a thaw by Thursday, when a mass of moist maritime air from the Atlantic should beat back the polar cold that has swept down from northeast Europe.

For Monday and Tuesday, temperatures in the north of France will nonetheless once again hover around minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit).

Cold in Britain continued to claim victims, as a 25-year-old man found unconscious overnight on a frozen lake in Warwickshire died some hours after being taken to hospital.

In Kent, a missing 29-year-old man was found dead in the snow on a path near his home, while in Dorset a 47-year-old woman — last seen out looking for her dog — died in similar circumstances.

Their deaths brought to 13 the reported toll from cold-related fatalities in Britain in the past 10 days.

Meanwhile in Morocco, officials said six people were killed and 30 injured in flooding which hit the region in the past few days. The six who died were all killed by road accidents.

In France, the driver of a road-salting vehicle was killed when the vehicle slid on black ice.

In Ireland, a 25-year-old man died after crashing through the thin ice of a lake near Gort, in County Galway, while trying to rescue his dog.

Temperatures in much of Britain hovered just above the freezing mark Sunday, and forecasters anticipated that the mercury would edge up slowly as the week progresses.

In Switzerland, freezing rain was blamed for a head-on collision Sunday between two cars on the Lausanne-Bern Highway that killed two women, aged 68 and 28, police said.

In Spain, a French lorry driver was killed early Sunday in the northern Burgos province after his truck slid out of control on an icy road.

The accident happened in the same area where three people were killed Friday in a car crash caused by heavy snow on the road.

The freezing weather is believed responsible for the deaths of at least 16 people in Spain since last week.

The capital Madrid was hit by heavy snowfalls early Sunday and the authorities advised against road travel in the region.

And in Italy, five people were reported missing after two separate avalanches in the northeast.

In Germany, a man in his 50s who had been missing for several days was found dead Saturday at Magdeburg, in the east, police said. His death brought to 42 the number of cold-linked fatalities in Germany.

18 killed in new Algerian massacre

ALGIERS (Agencies) — Terrorists killed 18 people and wounded another 18 in an overnight attack near Algiers, the security services said Monday, blaming the attack on Islamic fundamentalists.

The massacre occurred in Douaouda, 30 kilometres west of Algiers, the services said, giving no further details but adding that the "cowardly" attack was the work of a "terrorist group," the term officially used to refer to Armed Islamic Groups.

Civil defence personnel and security services went to the scene immediately to care for the survivors.

Douaouda, near the Mediterranean resort of Zeralda, has seen several civilian massacres in recent weeks.

Six days ago, six construction workers were hacked to death on their building site.

The new killing came just 24 hours after 16 people were killed in the village of Ben Achour, 50 kilometres south of Algiers.

About 50 rebels, split into four groups, attacked Ben Achour village in Blida province at night and killed 16 people from five families, including old people and a disabled man, they said.

Pro-government armed volunteers said the rebels turned on the civilians after fighting a three-hour gunbattle with the anti-rebel militia in which more than 10 guerrillas were killed.

The Algerian security forces reported the mass killing in a statement carried by the official Algerian News Agency (APS), blaming it on a "group of terrorists" — their term for Muslim guerrillas.

"Many of the victims were beheaded with axes," one villager who had seen the bodies told Reuters by telephone.

All members of one family were killed with their bodies torn apart when the rebels blew up their house with a bomb, another villager said.

A member of the armed anti-rebel volunteer force known as Patriots said the rebels killed the non-combatant civilians after they met stiff resistance from the volunteers in Ben Achour in a three-hour battle.

"More than 10 terrorists were killed in the battle," he said. He did not say if there were casualties among the pro-government forces.

Other residents said the battle was heavy and some of the army vehicles sent as reinforcement had been hit and destroyed by the guerrillas.

The residents said most of the adult men in Ben Achour had been armed by the authorities after guerrillas massacred 19 civilians in the village four months ago.

The news of the killings came one day after Prime Minister Ahmad Ouyahia said his government had largely quashed the five-year-old Muslim guerrilla struggle.

Ben Achour village is near Ferme Trap community where 10 civilians were killed in a rebel raid Sunday.

The latest killings brought to more than 90 the number of people killed in the past four weeks. More than 80 civilians were killed in November.

In a speech to Algeria's unelected quasi-parliament Saturday, Mr. Ouyahia said: "Terrorism is really reduced to a residual level."

Algeria uses the term "terrorism" for actions by the armed fundamentalists who have been fighting to overthrow the government for five years. About 60,000 people, including many civilians and more than 100 foreigners, have died in the violence.

The results achieved on the ground allow the government to reiterate that terrorism in Algeria has been defeated," Mr. Ouyahia said in his speech to the Transitional National Council.

But one member of the usually tame council underscored concerns about the continuing violence and urged the government to step up the battle against the rebels.

"The measures to fight the scourge (of terrorism) must be radically reviewed in order to end terrorism quickly and effectively," APS Sunday quoted the unnamed council member as asking the government.

Meanwhile, a leading Islamic extremist group Sunday warned France and other Western countries to stop providing aid to the Algerian government and keep out of the civil war between the government and fundamentalists in Algeria.

The warning by the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) came hours after the Ben Achour murders.

In a statement received by AFP, the armed wing of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) also denied involvement in terrorist operations outside Algeria.

It said Western governments led by France, the former colonial power in Algeria, continued to give financial assistance to what it called the "putschist" regime in Algeria, on the pretext of aid to the Algerian people.

"But the Algerian people sees with its own eyes that this aid is going towards the purchase of destructive and oppressive equipment which simply worsen the junta's crimes," it added.

At least 50,000 people have died since Islamic hardliners took up arms in 1992 after the now-banned FIS was denied almost-certain electoral victory when the military-backed government cancelled a second round of general elections.

The statement said the AIS considered the only legitimate aid to Algeria to be humanitarian. It had previously denounced aid of five to six billion francs (\$1 billion) being provided annually to Algeria by France.

The AIS warned Western governments "to stay out of the war in which the children of the people are faced with a rotten regime."

In a reference to a threatening letter addressed last month from a rival Islamic fundamentalist group to France's President Jacques Chirac, Sunday's statement said the AIS refused "all responsibility for any act affecting the security of peoples who have nothing to do with the crimes committed by the putschist regime."

In its letter to Mr. Chirac, the Islamic Armed Group, GIA, rival of the AIS, threatened to continue terrorist acts in France.

The Islamic Salvation Front has described this GIA text as a "manipulation" by Algerian intelligence services to coerce the West into giving the Algerian government more assistance.

Also Sunday, AFP obtained a copy of a videocassette distributed by the AIS on Internet, and showing its fighters deploying in Algeria.

The one-and-a-half hour long colour video in Arabic shows scenes from the life of the Mujahadeen in unidentified areas during 1995 and 1996, with claims of atrocities allegedly committed by the Algerian security forces.

It alleged these used napalm gas, and showed a grave with some 20 corpses and shots of destroyed houses and villages.

Kabul cleans up after bloody jet bombing

KABUL (AFP) — The U.S. embassy compound in Kabul was among the bomb sites being cleared by Afghan explosive experts Monday, a day after bombings in the capital left 12 dead and 69 wounded.

"Our Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams are still working in the United States embassy compound," said Homayoon Farid of the Halo Trust, a British-based demining agency.

Halo Trust teams rushed to the area Sunday shortly after two bombs belonging to the anti-Taliban alliance launched a vicious surprise attack, killing four and wounding 32.

Later in the day, a vegetable cart exploded in a central city bazaar killing eight and wounding 37, the Taleban-run state radio said.

Anti-aircraft fire cracked over Kabul Monday morning, but it was not clear if this was in response to an air intruder.

Even though the immediate danger of Sunday's devastating jet raid by Russian-made Sukhoi Su-22 bombers was over, the threat lingered on.

"We found 12 unexploded bombs in the U.S. embassy compound, along with many live tank shells and grenades," Mr. Farid said.

The opposition jets dropped a combination of at least four high-explosive blast-bombs, and four cluster-bombs, on the former diplomatic enclave of Wazir Akbar Khan.

Two of the blast bombs completely destroyed two civilian houses, a third exploded inside the U.S. embassy compound while the fourth smashed into a road, demolishing a large portion of the embassy's rear perimeter wall.

"The local security staff asked us to check the collapsed perimeter wall for possible bombs before they start repair work," Mr. Farid said.

The American's closed their embassy in Kabul before the April 1992 victory of the Mujahadeen over the Afghan Communist regime headed by ex-President Najibullah.

Days before the Taliban Islamic militia captured Kabul on Sept. 27, 1996, and ousted Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, the handful of resident foreign diplomats fled the country.

Indonesia has kept some junior officials on duty.

Also working in Wazir Akbar Khan Monday were EOD teams of the United Nations Demining Agency (ATC), who conducted a house-by-house check for unexploded bombs.

"A 250-kilogram cluster bomb can contain up to 150 sub-munitions (bombs)," said ATC field officer Mohammad Zahir.

After the jet releases the cluster-bomb, the main body is designed to burst open in the air and disperse powerful bomblets over a wide area, Mr. Zahir explained.

"We were lucky that the jet dropped the cluster-bombs from a low altitude. They didn't spread very far," Mr. Zahir added.

Levee breaks in California flood, homes endangered

SAN FRANCISCO (R) — Levees broke along several bloated northern California rivers Sunday, flooding wide areas of rich farmland and threatening houses but evacuees in other areas were allowed to return home.

While it was too early to estimate damage, local officials said losses to California's \$22 billion agricultural industry could be high. An unknown number of livestock perished in the flood and thousands of acres of farmland were under water.

Workers rushed to build a wall of earth around the small town of Meridian, 80 kilometres north of Sacramento, after a levee broke Saturday night, flooding farmland.

Authorities ordered the town's 300 residents to evacuate while workers rushed to build an earthen wall to try to hold back floodwater which was gradually spreading towards the town Sunday.

Although skies were clear, several other new levee breaks were reported in northern and central California as rivers, swelled by last week's heavy storms and melting snow, punched their way through the barriers.

"Just when you think things might start settling down, there's been a couple of other levee breaks today," Steve Martarano, a spokesman for the California Office of Emergency Services, said.

California was among states hardest hit by fierce storms that killed more than 20 people and caused hundreds of millions of dollars of damage in the western United States.

President Bill Clinton has declared a major disaster in parts of California, Idaho and Nevada hit by floods and mudslides, making federal aid available to victims.

Indian premier visits Bangladesh amid signs of warming relations

DHAKA (AFP) — Bangladesh Monday rolled out the red carpet for Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, the first Indian premier to visit Dhaka in more than 20 years, amid signs of warming bilateral ties.

Bangladesh Air Force jets escorted the special aircraft carrying Mr. Deve Gowda and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed welcomed her Indian counterpart for the two-day official trip.

Sheikh Hasina went to New Delhi last month to finalise an accord to share water from the Ganges River, ending the last major strain on ties between the two.

The Ganges water treaty — hailed as a boost for drought stricken regions in western Bangladesh — came into effect from Jan. 1, for the dry season.

Mr. Deve Gowda is the first Indian leader to visit Dhaka since the late Indira Gandhi in 1973.

"The visit is very significant to strengthen bilateral ties as it is taking place soon after" Sheikh Hasina's trip, one Foreign Ministry official said.

Welcoming Mr. Deve Gowda, the Daily Star newspaper said the Indian leader was "not just a prime minister for us. He represents new thinking on the part of Indian leadership."

It added that Mr. Deve Gowda has "brought us two nations to (the) threshold of a new vista full with promises of a mutually fashioned prosperity of both minds and materials."

The Bangladesh Observer daily also noted Mr. Deve Gowda's success in ending the major water-sharing problem and said it hoped a solution would be found to tribal insurgency and trade issues.

Talks between Mr. Deve Gowda and Sheikh Hasina were expected to focus on tribal insurgency in south-east Bangladesh, bordering India's Tripura state.

Some 50,000 Chakmas fled to Tripura in the 1980s, when Dhaka launched a programme to settle Bengali-speaking Muslims in the hilly region.

Buddhist tribesmen opposed the move and troops moved in, leading to an insurgency that has left more than 2,500 people dead. A slow repatriation of the tribesmen to their homes started two years ago, but Dhaka alleges that the tribal rebels operate from bases in India.

Dhaka has held several rounds of talks with tribal leaders in an attempt to end the dispute.

A 19-gun salute heralded the arrival of the Indian leader, who is the first state guest to visit Dhaka since Sheikh Hasina came to office in June 1996.

Mr. Deve Gowda held talks with several Bangladesh ministers soon after arriving in Dhaka and was the guest of honour at a reception hosted by Sheikh Hasina at her official Ganabhaban residence.

Mr. Deve Gowda, current chairman of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), is accompanied by a delegation including Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and Home Minister Indrajit Gupta.

SAARC groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Suharto calls for orderly election

JAKARTA (R) — President Suharto called Monday for Indonesia's general elections in May to be a "festival of democracy" without violence.

Mr. Suharto, delivering his annual budget address to parliament, described the May general election as "a festival of democracy for us. Normally as a festival, the general election must bring happiness to all of us."

"A general election campaign that causes damage — both physical and to people's property — must be avoided," Mr. Suharto said in the address broadcast live on national television.

"The excesses of such a campaign will only disgrace the general election and tarnish the democratic practices that we want to uphold in this country," he said.

Mr. Suharto said it was for this reason that the government had wanted to put the emphasis on a dialogue campaign by discussing development issues. Last month it issued regulations banning street rallies in the official one month campaign period.

He said it was unavoidable that the political climate would heat up ahead of the election.

"What we have to avoid is an uncontrolled situation, clashes and animosity among ourselves. This certainly is unhealthy and even endangers our nation," Mr. Suharto said, calling on people not to be antagonised by differences between each other.

"These kind of differences are the characteristics of democracy. Therefore, we can overcome them through democratic means as well," Mr. Suharto said.

Four major riots have erupted in Indonesia in the last six months, two of them in the last two weeks.

Political and social analysts said this indicated how quickly ethnic and religious tensions could explode in this disparate nation of 200 million people.

Officials in briefings ahead of the budget speech said the government would boost spending on information at home and abroad by 56.2 per cent to 286 billion rupiah (\$121 million).

1,000 French troops are in Kisangani — Zaire rebels

GOMA, Zaire (AFP) — Zairean rebels preparing for a counter-attack by government forces claimed Monday that French troops and South African and Angolan mercenaries were stationed in Zaire to help Kinshasa's army.

Rebel chief Laurent-Désire Kabila, speaking in the eastern town of Goma which is held by the mainly Tutsi forces, said 1,000 French troops as well as South African and Angolan mercenaries were in Kisangani, 500 kilometres west of here.

There was no immediate reaction from Kinshasa, but the claim was hotly denied by Paris.

A French Defence Ministry spokesman said there were no French troops in Zaire, except for five paramilitary officers and a military attaché at its embassy in Kinshasa.

It was a message repeated by the embassy itself, and aid and French as well as EU diplomatic missions in Kisangani said they had seen no sign of French or other foreign troops there.

The missions are in the town to help bring aid to 300,000 to 500,000 refugees and displaced people on the move in that region. A U.N. refugee agency team is also due there.

Mr. Kabila told AFP he was calling on the French government to withdraw its forces and change its policy of support for Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko.

"They are present on territory which is not French, to make war against whom?" Mr. Kabila said.

Kisangani is a strategic town that would be a major gathering point for a possible counter-attack by Zairean government forces which was announced last week by authorities in Kinshasa.

The Zairean government has stressed it will not negotiate with Mr. Kabila, whose forces have captured a large swathe of territory in the east of the country. Zairean Television reported over the weekend.

The television quoted Information Minister Koloni Longo as saying Zaire was determined to avenge the humiliating defeat inflicted by the rebels on government forces.

Mr. Kabila said there were also mercenaries from the South African company executive outcome — he did not give numbers — in Watsa, near Kisangani, and some 2,000 from the former Angolan rebel movement UNITA.

The South Africans should be withdrawn so that "their blood will not be spilled uselessly."

He said 3,000 to 4,000 Zairean army troops and elite Presidential Guards were in Kisangani preparing for the offensive. Government forces were deployed "in a radius of 30 kilometres around the town, where there is a curfew."

"We are watching for it and will break it. They can only make incursions. They will be surrounded and annihilated," he added.

"They have from two to four Antonov troop transport planes, 14 tanks, three helicopters and three fighter jets. We are watching them. This is the arsenal which is coming to crush the so-called rebellion."

The military situation in territory under rebel control was calm, Mr. Kabila said. "We are waiting for these gentlemen to negotiate their departure from the political scene. If they do not go willingly, they will be forced."

The rebel chief said that international mining companies had indicated they wanted to return to the mineral-rich region under rebel control, but were being prevented from doing so by "belligerents" in Europe.

He also took a swipe at France over the Central African Republic, where French and government forces clashed with mutinous troops Sunday, leaving 10 rebels dead.

It came after the killing of two French soldiers by the rebels, who had held part of the capital Bangui since the mutiny began on Nov. 15.

"The Central African people did not call on the French army to come and kill," Mr. Kabila said. "We are against foreign intervention. It is up to the people of the Central African Republic to resolve their problems, without the intervention of foreign forces."

Meanwhile, Executive Outcomes, a South African security company, Monday denied claims by Mr. Kabila that it is supplying mercenaries to fight alongside Zairean government troops.

"It is a lie," said Executive Outcomes managing director Eben Barlow. "Why would we be there? We were not asked by anyone to go there, we have no interest and no reason to be there."

"Kabila is lying," Mr. Barlow added.

The ultra-secretive Executive Outcome has in the past recruited what it terms "technical consultants" for Angola and Sierra Leone.

In Angola, the men — all seasoned soldiers — were paid until January 1995 by the government to protect diamond mines and installations and to train government troops.

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No perfect formulas

IT MIGHT sound politically correct to seek consensus on national issues but it is impossible to have all people agree on a reasonably democratic elections law for Jordan. Those who contend that consensus will be difficult invoke the argument that deputies will not endorse any electoral changes that might lessen their chances of winning in the next elections. Deputies and politicians who belong to constituencies that are currently over-represented will also want to maintain their acquired rights. Minorities will not want to see their share of seats in Parliament reduced or abolished. These are some of the reasons why a consensus on a new law is near impossible.

However, a constitutionally-based, democratically-oriented elections law must ensure that all Jordanians are represented in Parliament and the constitutional formula of equality among Jordanians is met.

The one-person, one-vote formula followed in the current law will certainly be appropriate if the law will be amended to divide the country into 80 equally populated electoral districts. If that is done, the one-person, one-vote principle will offer the most effective way to ensuring equality among voters regardless of the constituency in which they vote.

Therefore, the consensus that is being sought should be for an elections law based on the Constitution, in particular the stipulation that all Jordanians are equal. And once there is a broad agreement on the parameters of the new legislation to govern future elections, Parliament would be asked to refine the rough edges of the new formulation. Obviously, the projected new law would be put to the test, not once but several times. Once any flaw is detected, it would naturally be rectified in due course on the basis of experience until the most appropriate formula is reached. Jordan needs to perfect its democratic ways gradually and on the basis of newly acquired experiences. What is important is to keep the door open for improvement and for all involved to realise that they do not have a monopoly on truth.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

A WRITER for Al Ra'i discussed a current visit to Damascus by a delegation from the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, describing it as a step towards cementing relations among the Arab masses. The writer, whose pen name is Meem, said that the fact that Syria, which was in continuous conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood groups, is now taking a different stand and opening the door for a dialogue between its ruling Baath Party and the other political parties of the Arab World. The fact that the delegation, which in fact represents the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, is welcomed in Damascus bears significant meaning, added the writer. He said that the meetings between the delegation and the Baath Party, along with the other national political groups in Syria, represent a clear sign of openness and flexibility on the part of the Islamists in Jordan and, at the same time, it reflects a new trend in the Syrian policy at this important and critical stage facing the Arab Nation, according to the writer. He said that the present circumstances and the challenges facing the Arab countries make it imperative on the Arab leaders and Arab masses to join their ranks and work in solidarity to attain their legitimate, national aspirations. He said that perhaps the new development will usher in further tolerance and more political pluralism and in the Arab World.

COMMENTING ON what is happening in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on Hebron, a writer for Al Dustour said that U.S. envoy Dennis Ross is biased towards Israel and therefore nothing favourable for the Palestinians is expected from his mediation. Saleh Qallah accused Mr. Ross of not exercising pressure on the Israelis, to force them to comply with the Oslo accords and pull out the Israeli forces from Hebron, but rather putting more and more pressures on the Palestinians to give way to Benjamin Netanyahu's desires and accept his terms. The writer said that Mr. Ross wants the Palestinians to give more concessions to Mr. Netanyahu to help him overcome the difficulty he is facing in his relations with the small religious and extremist parties in his government who reject the Oslo deals and the redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron. Instead of putting an end to this fiasco, Mr. Ross is exerting more and more pressures on the Palestinians and this, said the writer, shows clearly that the envoy is there, at the negotiation table, just to help Israel have its way with the Palestinians.

The View from Fourth Circle

Reading Jordanian rage, Arab attitudes and Israeli policies

By Rami G. Khouri

IN THE troublesome stalemate in peace making between Arabs and Israelis, Hebron is the focal point of immediate political logistics — but Jordan reflects the broader context of deteriorating Arab attitudes towards peace with the present Israeli government. Over two years after Jordan and Israel signed a peace accord that promised the first warm peace between Arabs and Israelis, the atmosphere in Jordan has turned distinctly sour towards Israel.

Widescale Jordanian public opposition to "normalisation" with Israel has focused sharply on the Israeli trade exhibition that is scheduled to open in Amman tomorrow. A vigorous campaign led by the widely respected former prime minister Ahmad Obeidat failed to stop the Israeli trade fair, and shifted its efforts instead to discouraging Jordanians from attending the event. The language being used by Jordanians to oppose the trade fair is worth analysing.

Page one newspaper advertisements in the leading Jordanian newspapers this week have featured the following slogans: "No normalisation with occupiers", "No to the Zionist fair in Amman", "Jordan is not the Zionist bridge to the Arab World", "No to normalisation with the Zionist enemy" and "All efforts directed to stopping the exhibition of 'Israeli' products in Amman".

The Jordan Engineers Association, which has spearheaded the campaign against the trade fair and normalisation in general, has put up a blackboard in its offices on which it says it will list the names of Jordanian firms that deal with Israelis. The "Jordanian national committee to prevent the Israeli industrial exhibition" announced last week that it would launch a blacklist of Jordanian individuals and companies that attend the fair, with a view to having them boycotted in Jordan and throughout the Arab World. The Jordan Press Association asked Jordanian newspapers to run free ads against the fair, and asked Jordanian journalists and newspapers not to cover the event.

Individual exhortations on local electronic bulletin boards have stated that "We don't want any Zionist influence in our beloved Jordanian Arab country," and have requested "Please, everybody, don't visit such a painful fair, remember our Arab and Muslim casualties and how many people Jews did kill and are still killing... we will never forget... we will never forgive."

The committee against the Israeli fair has also asked Jordanians to hoist the Jordanian flag on their houses, offices, organisations and cars Wednesday, as a sign of rejection of the Israeli fair and of normalisation with Israel. The committee's newspaper advertisements asked for the show of flags as a sign of "preserving national sovereignty".

This determined popular show of opposition to relations with Israel has been coupled with an equally obvious cooling in official attitudes to Israel. When the Israeli embassy, inaugurated its new premises on Dec. 19, in the presence of Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, the Jordanian del-

egation was most noteworthy for the absence of any senior ministers; it was represented by the minister of state for foreign affairs. At an international seminar in Aqaba earlier this week, on the role of education in peaceful coexistence, the minister of higher education, Abdullah Ensour, did not attend the event but instead had his speech delivered by the director of his ministry's Department of Student Affairs. As noteworthy as his absence was the tone of his message: he denounced Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, saying that these policies threaten to destabilise the entire region. This message has been repeatedly stated, loud and clear, by the entire Jordanian leadership in recent months.

The most troubling example of grassroots disdain for Israeli policies that I ran into in Amman last week was a sign in a shop frequented by Jordanians and foreigners. The small, hand written sign, obviously made and displayed in a fit of deep anger, was placed in a prominent position in the shop, and it stated: "No dogs, no Jews".

I suggested to the shopkeeper that this was an inappropriate and ultimately counter-productive expression of our understandable frustration with Israeli policies, and contrary to Arab and Islamic morality, and that it might offend some of his clients. He casually took his anger and scorn to a higher level, telling me that, indeed, some people objected to the reference to dogs, but not to Jews.

What should we make of all this? More importantly, what should Israelis and Jews around the world make of all this? Several points come to mind.

1. The intensity and tone of the anti-normalisation campaign should not be shrugged off as either a passing emotional outburst or an intrinsic Jordanian/Arab inability to coexist with Jews or Israelis. Rather, it reflects real, widespread and immediate anger throughout Jordanian society at the political implications of the present policies of the Netanyahu government on settlements, Hebron, Jerusalem and other key issues.

2. The tone and the language of the Jordanian anti-normalisation opposition are not merely tactical or even ideological — they are existential, almost apocalyptic. They reflect a common Jordanian/Arab perception that current Israeli state policies and settler attitudes threaten the very existence and perpetuation of indigenous Palestinian, Jordanian and other Arab identities. The very word Israel, which had found its way into our daily vocabulary in recent years, has once again moved to the periphery of the permissible and to the outer limits of the legitimate. "Israel" is now, once again, frequently placed in quotation marks, or replaced with that old standby "the Zionist enemy". Some — many — Jordanians see an Israeli trade fair as a threat to our national sovereignty, and even to the well-being of the entire Arab World.

3. We are witnessing qualitative changes and new elements in the political landscape, rather than reruns of old scenarios. One, two and four years ago, the anti-normali-

sation camp in Jordan sought to stop the peace treaty and its implementation, but achieved very little; today, anti-normalisation sentiment permeates much of the society. This is a sign of two related phenomena that move and change together: Israeli official policies in Palestine and other Arab lands, and Jordanian public attitudes. We should not deny the association between the extreme new attitudes in Jordan and the extreme new policies in Israel.

4. An important dimension of the anti-normalisation campaign rests within domestic Jordanian politics. Ahmad Obeidat, Laith Shbeilat, and the anti-normalisation coalition formed in November by the efforts of another respected former prime minister, Taher Masi, may have found the key to the birth of a credible, legitimate and effective domestic loyal opposition such as this country has never really experienced in its modern history — an opposition that may one day look back and trace its birth to the impact of Israeli government policies in Palestine and Lebanon, in particular. This speaks loudly about how much Jordanians care about the condition of fellow Arabs, which should prompt thoughtful Israelis to better understand our frequent calls for a peace that is "just and comprehensive". (The potential tragic flaw of the anti-normalisation group is its adoption of non-democratic, quasi-authoritarian nonsense such as blacklisting and boycotting individuals and companies that deal with Israel; one hopes that they drop such MacCarthystic bullying and stick to democratic tactics.)

5. When emotions are high as they are now, we must maintain an even higher rational capacity to differentiate between four parallel phenomena in Jordan today: a) the fury of ordinary Jordanians who speak of Jews and dogs in the same breath — even though these same Jordanians a year ago may have been exploring possible business opportunities with Israelis or visits to Israel; b) serious political activism by Jordanians who have translated their anger with Israeli into a campaign to build a credible domestic opposition force, partly, I think, in order to settle scores with a Jordanian government that they feel ignored them during the 1991-1994 peace negotiations; c) the Jordanian government's correct diplomatic expressions of concern about the negative impact of the Israeli government's policies on the peace process; and d) the Jordanian government's very deliberate policy of maintaining all the ongoing channels of normalisation, peace making and peace building between Jordan and Israel; this reflects an important differentiation between Jordan's strong opposition to the policies of the present Israeli government and Jordan's equally vehement support for the strategic, long-term goals of peace building, coexistence, reconciliation and cooperation with Israel.

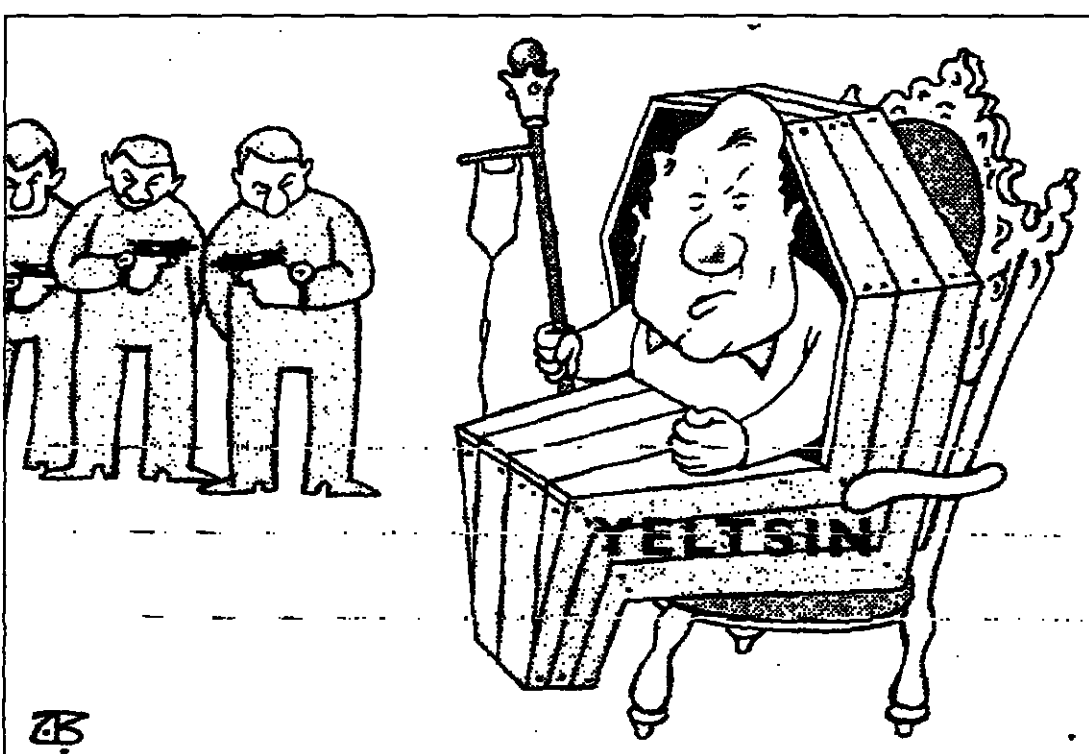
Jordan teaches us much today about the political impact of changed Arab attitudes, and also about the political impact of changed Israeli policies.

Can Russia ever be secured?

"PEACE SETTLEMENTS in Europe stand or fall by how successful they are at including the defeated," broods one of the Western diplomats whose job it is to put Europe's new security map together. "The cold war ended more than seven years ago and there is still no settled role for Russia in Europe." At the summit in Lisbon, at the beginning of December, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) — whose 54 members include the United States and Canada — strove to build a lasting arrangement that binds in Russia. But, as the new Europe takes shape, Russia is still an awkward fit.

The big cause of friction between Russia and the West has been NATO's decision to admit new members from among Russia's former allies in Eastern Europe. Standing in for a recovering Boris Yeltsin, Russia's prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, gave warning in Lisbon of "new dividing lines" in Europe if NATO went ahead with plans to expand close to Russia's borders. "Yes, Russia has no veto over the enlargement of NATO," he acknowledged. "But nor do others have a veto over our right to defend our national interests." This barely veiled promise of retaliation was aimed at NATO's foreign ministers who gathered in Brussels, hoping to set a date around the middle of next year for a special meeting of the alliance to open formal negotiations with likely newcomers, such as the Poles, Czechs and Hungarians.

Western governments had been hoping to soften Russia's opposition to NATO expansion in time for a NATO-Russia charter or treaty to be ready for next year's alliance summit. But time is running short. Russian officials sound tough one day, conciliatory the next. All the while, they are probing to see just how



much they can get in return for accepting a shift in a European geostrategic map whose new outline they admit they cannot expect to change.

Though parts of a deal are falling into place, efforts to build a stable peace in Europe could yet founder on Russia's hostility to NATO enlargement

The Russians began their campaign to put NATO in clamps some time ago, with a proposal that the OSCE, the only European group to include just about everyone (except Serbia and Montenegro), should take charge of security matters; other organisations, including NATO and the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States, would be answerable to it. The bigger powers, including the United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany, would act as a sort of European Security Council. But this idea found favour with no one. The big

and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe in the 21st century" announced recently at Lisbon is long on fine-sounding phrases — "cooperative", "security", "empowering" of governments and individuals to use the OSCE to sort out problems, the enhancing of "complementarity" among Europe's many different organisations — but notably short on substance. Work will continue on a more detailed "Charter on European Security," but the OSCE itself will be merely a hub around which all this activity takes place, not the

driving-force behind it. All the same, the Russians did not come away from Lisbon empty-handed. The 30 countries that belong to the treaty limiting Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) agreed to Russia's request that weapons limits be thought out anew. The CFE was originally negotiated between NATO and the now-defunct Warsaw Pact. The idea now is to move to national rather than block limits. New kinds of equipment, including naval, may be counted. New members may, at a pinch, be brought in. All sides agree that they should try to reduce the total number of heavy weapons. The new talks, expected to open this month and to last about 18 months, set alongside the slimming and reform of NATO's own military set-up, ought to ease Russia's worry that an enlarged NATO will be a threat to it.

NATO is also trying to reassure Russia on the nuclear front. Russian officials, including the new defence minister, have from time to time threatened to

deploy more nuclear missiles to counter what they see as a heightened nuclear threat from a larger NATO. Though NATO as a defence alliance is backed by a nuclear guarantee, it is saying that it does not plan to put nuclear weapons on the territory of new members. The deciding matter. Such reassurances, rather like the OSCE's fine words and fancy security models, all have their part to play. But for Russia they are not enough. Conscious of the damage Russia could still do to Europe's part-finished security structure, and of the need to avoid adding to Russia's lengthening list of grievances, NATO has tried hard to interest Russia in a "special" relationship — one that would, as the diplomatic phrase goes, give Russia "a voice, but no veto" in NATO's discussions of security issues.

The centrepiece of such a relationship would be a new charter or treaty, negotiated in parallel with NATO's enlargement, giving Russia the status it thinks it deserves as Europe's largest country and biggest military power. But how deserving? Western officials point to NATO-Russian cooperation in Bosnia, where Russia makes the biggest non-NATO contribution to the NATO-led force there, as an example of the sort of collaboration they have in mind.

At a meeting of NATO

defence ministers in Bergen last September, America's defence secretary, William Perry, offered much more, including the exchange of military liaison officers, the creation of joint crisis-management mechanisms, and regular ministerial meetings. Russia, he seemed to suggest, would be welcome everywhere in NATO, bar the inner sanctum where NATO most intimately discusses its military organisation. Not all NATO officials, especially European ones, would lay out such a large welcome mat. But all want to include Russia in discussions on a wide range of security issues.

The Russians point to Bosnia too — but as an example of how the West excludes them from the decisions that count. The force there is still NATO-led: western governments largely set the agenda for implementing the Dayton peace accords, including the agenda at this week's London conference on Bosnia. From Russia's think-tanks and parliament come demands not just for a voice but for an equal say (a veto in all but name), in all NATO discussions on European security. It is this right, say these Russians, not simply an invitation to sit at some NATO tables, that should be enshrined in a legally binding treaty. But it is not on offer. Most Russian officials realise that. One difficulty is to sell the deal being offered in its place to their parliament. Though scarcely a "defeated" power in the traditional sense of the word, and as much in need of peace and security as anyone, Russia sees little to be pleased about in the recent turn of events in Europe. Just about everything, short of giving Russia a veto over NATO's activities, has been tried to coax Russia into a more cooperative mood. But will it be enough?

Arab cies

Jordan sought to stop the... but achieved very little... two related phenomena... Israeli official policies... the association between... and the extreme new... within domestic Jordanian... the efforts of... minister, Taher Masi... opposition such as this... in its modern history... look back and trace... policies in Palestine... peaks fondly about how... condition of fellow Arabs... of Israel to better under... peace that is "just and... the flow of the anti-normalisation... democratic spirit... tickling and bow-crawling... deal with Israel, one hopes... the bullying and sick...

Tourism official gets a first-hand account of problems facing Wadi Mousa hoteliers

Solutions to some problems found but others need work; Masarweh asks for specific recommendations

By Ghaila Alul
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A visit by Ministry of Tourism Secretary General Akram Masarweh to Wadi Mousa on Monday provided solutions to some problems facing hoteliers in the town, but some other problems still linger, hotel owners told the Jordan Times.

They complained that tourism in Petra was very slow during 1996, attributing the problem partly to Israeli agents offering seven-day package tours to the Holy Land with the seventh day free to Petra.

In a half-page advertisement run in an Arabic daily last month, the hoteliers said that in the beginning of 1996 the southern border crossing with Jordan used to close at 3 o'clock in the afternoon which prompted tourists to spend the night in Jordan. The government subsequently decided to open the border crossing for 24 hours enabling tourists to travel to Petra from Israel and travel back in the same day.

Hotel owners said that in 1996 occupancy rates were as low as 10 per cent that they do not benefit

from tourists who bring their food and drinks with them during their one-day visit to Petra.

"Visitors should not be allowed to take their food and drinks inside Petra," owner of Petra Diamond Hotel, Mohammad Hasanat told the Jordan Times, urging the government to reschedule the closing time of the southern border crossing point to 3 p.m.

Owner of small hotels were reducing the prices considerably making competition impossible.

The general manager of Petra Forum Hotel, Na'el Kavar, confirmed this and told the Jordan Times that there was no fixed pricing system in Petra, and that some five star hotels offer the same rates as two star hotels.

"Petra is the focal point of tourism, but we have a system that is not good to begin with... We should have a governing body to take the responsibility and control this," he said.

Mr. Kavar added that part of the problem is that "Jordan outpriced itself in the market" saying that the entrance fee to Petra was very high and hotel rates were also high before they decided to cut down on their prices because of lack of clients.

Hoteliers also complained of the government's failure to provide them with the proper infrastructure for the conduct of their business like a sewage system, high voltage electricity, telephone lines and paved roads.

They added that electricity usually gets cut off for hours without prior warning.

They suggested that electricity and water costs be lowered.

During his visit to the town Monday Mr. Masarweh was quoted by participants as saying that the ministry could not initiate such an action as issues relating to electricity are the responsibility of the electricity company.

Ziad Toweisi of Petra Inn demanded that roads to big investments be asphalted.

Hoteliers said that lack of tourism in Petra rendered hotels unable to cover their expenses. Thus, they urged the government to intervene with banks to reschedule their debts and reduce interest accumulated on their loans.

Hoteliers also called on the ministry to reconsider the classifications of all hotels in the area. They

said that the permits the ministry issued for hotels do not correspond with services they provide.

While five-star hotels are granted 100 per cent tax reduction, they said, other hotels have to pay full taxes.

But Mr. Masarweh said the ministry is ready to receive complaints from classified hotels and look into their problems in order to take "the necessary decisions."

The government has started improving the Wadi Mousa infrastructure through the implementation of several projects at a cost of JD 75 million to be spent during the next two years, Mr. Masarweh added.

He stressed that the ministry will take the hoteliers' recommendations into consideration and try to find proper solutions to their problems.

But Mr. Masarweh stressed that the flow of tourists does not depend on services offered by the hotels and domestic considerations only.

He said the free international tourism market is influenced by political events that affect the flow of tourists into the region.

King assures Arab businessmen

(Continued from page 1)

to close the doors and the windows because we cannot isolate ourselves from the world and we are determined to open up to the world and recognise the volume of challenges that are facing us so that we can take practical steps and increase our production to the level that would enable us to catch up with the others and compete with them and deal with them on equal footing," the King told the meeting.

"We have no alternative but to organise a revolution that would not be violent or causing distress or despair, but rather a white revolution to subdue the elements of weakness and backwardness and disintegration and we must renew our determination to work and reach a bright future," the King stressed.

King Hussein voiced appreciation of the efforts of the Jordanian and Egyptian businessmen associations for organising the meeting and lauded the efforts of Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid in making the Arab League a home for all the Arabs.

Mr. Abdul Meguid later addressed the meeting expressing hope that the year 1997 will witness the establishment of comprehensive peace in the Middle East so that "Arab efforts will be directed towards comprehensive economic development and economic cooperation."

He said that the coming decade will witness the emergence of major world economic and political blocs and there will be no place except for the strong and for

those who are able to stand fast.

Mr. Abdul Meguid said that in view of the regional and international developments the business communities in the Arab World should lead the way in enhancing inter-Arab trade under the umbrella of the Arab League.

President of the Jordanian Businessmen Association Hamdi Tabbaa told the meeting that inter-Arab economic cooperation was still below the minimum level despite all efforts.

He said that Arab businessmen should shoulder the major responsibility towards future generations and towards addressing poverty and social problems plaguing the Arab World.

He urged the participants to help revive the Arab Common Market and to adopt an pan-Arab development strategy. Mr. Tabbaa called on the Arab countries to follow the example of the European nations by forging economic unity and embark on a collective Arab economic action.

He also called for the creation of a pan-Arab business council which would pave the way for economic integration in the Arab World.

Later Mr. Tabbaa and Saeed Tawil, chairman of the Egyptian Businessmen Association, presented the King the conference's shield.

The three-day meeting will discuss means for bolstering inter-Arab economic cooperation and will review working papers from 15 Arab countries discussing the role of the private sector in promoting Arab economic and trade relations.

Randa Habib's corner

Lying 'honestly'

AFTER SO many months sitting idle beside the telephone set, he was overwhelmingly excited about taking up his new job. The man had been waiting for so long for the opportunity to reach high places. But also high on his agenda was to do a good job under the limelight and please his boss. And that is exactly what he intended to tell him.

A broad grin covered his boss's face as he received him behind a luxurious desk:

— Welcome to our company. I have seen your credentials, you seem to be the man we were looking for.

— Thank you sir, replied the man. Indeed, I am honoured to be working with you, having heard about your competence.

— Great! But let us first lay down ground rules for your job. First of all, our priority in this company is truth and honesty.

— Yes sir, I will always tell the truth.

— Good. But of course we have to take in consideration many aspects.

— Sorry?

— I mean that truth has to be in our best interest, because some things...

— I may have lost you here, said the would-be employee seeking an explanation.

— Honesty and truth, says the boss, are assets. And in that sense they should never harm the reputation or the good work of our formation. In other words, we should use the truth to our advantage and never allow it to destroy us.

— So we only tell the truth when it is to the benefit to the company?

— Right.

— But we still claim that truth and honesty are the main target of our company?

— Absolutely, and people have no other way but to believe us, although some of them know that we lie time and again.

— How can I go around it? Please tell me, as I am so eager to please you.

— Easy: claim that you always tell the truth, that you despise liars, that honesty is, in your opinion, the most important quality for a man. Then, when the situation becomes embarrassing, lie, cover up, evade questions and you will be all right. After all, life is just a bluff. And the road to success is to learn how to bluff in everything you do.

— Can I be utterly truthful with you?

— Yes, but only the way I just taught you.

— You are the most honest man I have ever met.

Environment strategy in Jordan

— concerns and priorities

By Bunker Roy

AS CHAIRMAN of the largest southern-based network of environmental organisations in the world, based in Nairobi, Kenya, called the Environment Centre International (ELCI), I was invited by the General Corporation for Environment Protection (GCEP) to assist the Jordan in preparing an environment strategy for the future in the area of Public Awareness and Environment Education (PAAEE).

Our organisation has 800 members, spread over 107 countries.

A week's exposure to a wide cross section of people, from a farmer who once lived in the now abandoned village of Kurkuma (5 kilometres from Hashimiyah, in Ajloun), an old, respected, rural woman in the village of Zoubiya who has been growing olives and grapes for 40 years, to scientists, technologists and planners at the Royal Scientific Society (RSS) and a stimulating interaction with the minister of environment, prompted some thoughts that might be useful to environment policy-makers in Jordan.

The discussions I held with all these people made clear the need for finding alternative strategies to protect and improve the environment.

What has been done so far is creditable, but not enough to benefit the rural communities, in Jordan. More low cost, environmentally acceptable solutions have to be introduced, that would involve people even more in the planning process and create forums where their voices could be heard in earnest.

The time has come to learn from the experience of others abroad and adopt ideas, methods and processes that had been tried, tested and proved at the community level, and that could benefit Jordan in the future.

Globally, there seems to be a visible shift towards looking for solutions that

reduce the dependency of the community on government structures and services. In a country with a culture and history as old and rich as Jordan's, the knowledge, skills and practical wisdom of the people living in rural communities must be phenomenal and it is a shame that they remain under-utilised today. It is of some concern that this vast bank of knowledge found in very ordinary people has not been tapped enough and it should be one of the strategies in the future of the PAAEE campaign to document this knowledge, skill and the way people protected and improved the environment on their own, without any outside help.

Today, the ELCI, with half a million dollars from the U.N.-Volunteers and the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), is implementing a project of identifying such ordinary people in 11 countries around the world. They are called Eco-Volunteers. An Eco-Volunteer is someone living in a village, who may be illiterate, but on his/her own, in his/her small way, without any human, technical and financial assistance from outside, has started protecting the natural resources.

Someone who has been born and brought up in a village and who commands respect in the community for the work they are doing protecting trees, collecting traditional varieties of seed, collecting rainwater and setting an example is an Eco-Volunteer. Such ordinary but extraordinary people are to be found everywhere in the world — including Jordan.

The strategy of the PAAEE should be to identify Eco-Volunteers by the hundreds and give them a nominal stipend to carry on with their work. If the ideas are innovative, then they need to be replicated elsewhere in the country and the GCEP would be the best organisation to facilitate this process.

One strong indicator that the rural areas are being comparatively neglected in Jordan is the alarming num-

ber of people migrating to the cities and large towns. The long-term environmental strategy should be to reverse this trend by improving the quality of life in villages and small communities — by providing drinking water, power and employment so that they are persuaded to go back. This will decrease the pressure on civic amenities in cities and large towns. It might not be easy, but the first step needs to be taken.

It is a serious mistake to presume that policies, ideas and methods good for the urban areas are suitable for rural areas. In many countries of the world, what has been thought of in cities have been imposed on rural communities without consulting the people in the area; that has proved disastrous and counterproductive. The irony is that when projects do not work out, the people in the area are blamed not the so-called "experts". The definition of an expert today is an ordinary man from another town; in India, the biggest threat to development and change is the paper-qualified expert who has no idea of grassroot realities.

If the long-term environmental strategy is designed to yield better, faster and more sustainable results, an attitudinal change is necessary in the minds of the experts formulating policies. The priorities are to focus on critical areas where the direct involvement of the people should be our first concern.

By far, the most critical area of concern is the need to accept that people living and surviving in a fragile environment know much more about the problems and solutions to their environment than a city-based expert. One needs to have the time and patience to sit and listen to these people. Meetings need to be organised and they must feel they are being taken seriously. If the PAAEE campaign of the GCEP could facilitate this dialogue, much of the environmental problems in this country could be solved — at much lower cost.

The second challenge lies with the scientists and technologists in Jordan. If people are to be consulted, if their knowledge and skills are to be identified and mobilised as a sustainable solution for their own development, then clearly there is a need to demystify technology.

Experience elsewhere in the world has shown that the most sophisticated technologies (solar photo-voltaics, bio-gas, wind) can easily be fabricated, installed, repaired and maintained by semi-literate, poorly paper-qualified rural people and there is no reason why this could not be possible in Jordan.

India is prepared to train the jobless and the unemployed living in rural communities in the Barefoot College in Tilonia (Rajasthan) to become barefoot solar engineers, barefoot water chemists (testing water for potability with mobile kits) and barefoot communicators. The idea is that eventually they will return to their communities and be constructive and productive members of society.

Any environmental strategy that promotes the exploitation of natural resources, like ground water, at the expense of conserving rainwater through traditionally accepted rainwater harvesting structures for drinking, is encouraging a dangerously faulty and short-sighted policy.

Today it is prohibitively expensive and environmentally disastrous to over-exploit ground water for drinking when old technologies have shown that collection of rainwater in open wells can suffice. It is prohibitively wasteful to invest in drilling rigs, in water pipes to transport water, in deep well pumps and in technical manpower to reach drinking water to the population when adequate rainwater harvesting structures in size and volume can meet these needs. It would generate employment among the unemployed to construct these vast structures and, more

important, allow for the precious natural resource to be controlled by the community.

Several pilot projects could be tried, especially in villages where testing has shown water to be unfit for drinking because it is brackish or contaminated or has high TDS, iron or fluorides.

Last year, the Barefoot College in India collected 9 million litres of rain water in structures made out of local materials, using village masons and rural skills spread over 50 rural schools in an area where the ground water was unfit for drinking. It cost \$0.03 cents per litre to construct the network of rainwater harvesting structures that collected 9 million litres; again, there is no reason why it could not be replicated in Jordan.

While the PAAEE campaign uses television and radio to promote clean and green environment, free of air, noise, water and waste pollution, the most effective communication strategy would be traditional media, face-to-face encounters and storytellers, found in villages even today, to start a dialogue on the environment.

What is required is a two-way communication network. The strategy adopted by the PAAEE to spread the message on the environment in rural areas should be to concentrate on schools, parents, farmers and labourers through traditional media, like puppet shows. When such information was requested in Amman, not only was it not available, but the stock answer was that it was so primitive it could not possibly exist. Nevertheless, in Ajloun, we saw two committed Jordanian youngsters put up a puppet show with an effective script focused on the environment and it was an absolute joy to see the performance.

The job of the government is to provide the space and opportunity to let them grow and develop themselves — the ultimate sustainable solution.

stronger than all the TV and radio programmes put together. Their financial needs, in comparison, will be negligible.

Having expressed the concerns and priorities of the environmental strategy in the future, I would now state what the steps proposed to be taken to translate these ideas into action are.

It is proposed for Jordan to enter into a formal agreement between the GCEP and the Barefoot College in Tilonia (Rajasthan) to fully solar electrify the deserted village of Kurkuma and collect rainwater in open wells for drinking. Semi-literate rural youth unemployed but coming from nearby villages will be trained to be barefoot solar engineers — fabricate inverters, charge controllers and solar lanterns and establish a workshop for repair and maintenance in the village itself. Solar pumps will distribute rainwater from wells, for drinking, to all houses and photovoltaics will be used for lighting. It will be the first project of its kind in the country. A mobile water testing laboratory run on solar power will be established at the village level to carry out water quality tests in surrounding villages and information will be sent to the government.

In south Jordan, the proposal is to work in one of the many field stations under the RSS, possibly in Jurf Al Darawish, and try the same ideas there involving the GCEP, environmental NGOs, the community and the Barefoot College in India — all equal and active partners.

In the final analysis, it all boils down to how much trust and faith we have in the capacity of ordinary people to use their knowledge, skills and wisdom to protect their own environment.

The job of the government is to provide the space and opportunity to let them grow and develop themselves — the ultimate sustainable solution.

We are living under Israeli rules and regulations and under the Israeli system," he said using his oratory skills as a mosque preacher to attack "those who issued fatwas

Israeli Islamist urges pressure on Netanyahu through freezing ties

AMMAN — The leader of the Islamic Movement in Israel on Monday called on the Arab World to freeze normalisation of relations with the Jewish state until it makes progress in implementing its agreements with the Palestinians and resumes negotiations with Syria and Lebanon.

Abdullah Nimr Darwish, addressing a press conference, also rejected criticism over his movement's decision to enter the Israeli parliament through May's elections saying that representation in the legislature was the only for Israeli Arabs to work within the system to improve their lot.

Sheikh Darwish, who is visiting Jordan leading a delegation representing the Islamic Movement in Israel, also said democratic opposition in the Arab World was a must.

Such opposition, he said, would also serve the political purpose of sending a message to the Israeli government that Arab countries also have dissenting opinion just as Israel has to contend with opposition.

The sheikh was answering a question on a campaign mounted by opposition parties in Jordan against an Israeli trade exhibition scheduled to open here Wednesday.

Sheikh Darwish told the press conference that Arab countries should pressure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to honour his country's agreements with the Palestinians by holding back moves to normalise ties with the Jewish state.

In the long term, he said, Israeli evacuation of Palestinian territories should come during Mr. Netanyahu's tenure as head of government.

The logic behind this argument, he implied, no Israeli government could be more hard line than the Netanyahu coalition and, as such, dealing with this government meant dealing with the core of the hard line in Israel.

Sheikh Darwish, whose group has four members in the Knesset, assailed criticism levelled by some Islamists against its presence in the Israeli legislature.

"We are living under Israeli rules and regulations and under the Israeli system," he said using his oratory skills as a mosque preacher to attack "those who issued fatwas

against our decision to run in the elections."

"Is there any other way we could have had a role in making decisions that affect our lives without joining the Israeli legislature?" he said.

Furthermore, he said, the Islamist presence in the Knesset is not only helping improve the lot of Arab Israelis against discrimination by the Jewish-led government but also acting as a bridgehead with the Arab countries.

The Islamist Movement in Israel, he said, does not maintain stronger relations with headline Palestinian groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad than it does with the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

As far as his group is concerned, he added, the PNA "is the forerunner of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital."

On that basis, the Islamic Movement often tries to settle differences between the PNA leadership and the Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups, he said, recalling that his group was the main force behind an inter-Palestinian dialogue launched in late 1995.

Abdul Malek Dahan-mshah, a Knesset member from the Islamic Movement, told the press conference that the health situation of Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin was worsening and implicitly called on the Israeli government to release him.

Sheikh Yassin, who has lost the use of his limbs, is serving a life sentence in an Israeli jail. According to Mr. Dahamshah, journalists who "interview" Sheikh Yassin are often eager to get something new out of the Hamas leader and often end up misquoting him or quoting him out of context.

As such, said the deputy, the actual views of Sheikh Yassin on the developments in the Palestinian territories have never appeared in the press.

Mr. Dahamshah said Sheikh Yassin has been bedridden for the entire 1996 and continues to be severely ill.

That prompted Sheikh Darwish to issue a strong warning to Israel:

"If something happens to Sheikh Yassin (like him dying in prison), then nobody will be able to control the outburst in the West Bank and Gaza Strip."

King Fahd: Saudi Arabia working hard to find jobs for citizens

DUBAI (R) — Saudi Arabia's King Fahd has said that the kingdom was working hard to find more jobs for its people and urged young Saudis to learn appropriate skills.

"The state's concern for national manpower is not a mere slogan. It is a clearly stated objective we are working very hard to achieve," the king said.

King Fahd made his comments in an interview published by the Saudi Okaz newspaper and its sister English-language Saudi Gazette.

"The state is keen to provide sufficient work opportunities for our young people. I would urge them to seek more skills and learning in areas more relevant to national development plans. More emphasis should be placed on technical and vocational specialisations needed in the country," he added.

Saudi Arabia's 1995-2000 development plan set a target of creating 659,900 jobs for Saudis by the end of the century.

About six million expatriates work in the kingdom, which has a population of around 18 million. Analysts estimate that less than seven per cent of private sector employees are Saudi and some economists put unemployment as high as 20 per cent. About half the population is under the age of 20.

The king said the private sector would play an important role in developing the country, the world's largest oil producer and exporter.

"We expect from this vital sector more productive investment projects to effectively contribute in the achievement of the state's development policies and plans which aim at diversifying the national income's sources and boosting the productivity of this sector," King Fahd said.

"The state, on its part, will not hesitate in providing support till we translate the sixth five-year plan (to 2000) into a concrete achievement," he stressed.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has boosted projected spending by more than \$8 billion in 1997 amid expectations that crude prices will remain firm and non-oil exports will grow.

Announcing its budget for calendar 1997, the world's biggest oil producer and exporter said that high oil prices doubled growth rates to around 8.7 per cent in 1996 from 4.3 per cent in 1995.

Spending for 1997 was projected at 181 billion Saudi riyals (\$48.2 billion) and revenues at 164 billion riyals (\$43.7 billion). This created a deficit of around \$4.5 billion, lower than the estimated shortfall of \$4.9 billion in 1996.

Expenditure was higher by \$8.2 billion over the 1996 spending of around \$40 billion and bankers attributed this to an optimistic outlook about the world oil market and the Gulf country's exports.

"Saudi planners are optimistic about oil prices in 1997 and they expect exports of petrochemicals and other non-oil products to increase further. This is the main reason for the higher forecast spending," a Saudi banker said.

The 1997 deficit accounted for around 3.2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) compared with nearly 3.5 per cent in 1996, bankers said.

A budget breakdown showed around 41.6 billion riyals (\$11 billion) were allocated for education and national manpower training, and 17.7 billion riyals (\$4.7 billion) for health and social services.

The communications sector received about 10.4 billion riyals (\$2.7 billion) while around 8.6 billion riyals (\$2.2 billion) were earmarked for industry and electricity, and 7.1 billion riyals (\$1.8 billion) for subsidies, according to the statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency.

It did not specify defence allocations but in previous years they consumed up to 30-35 per

cent of the total expenditure as Saudi Arabia has been engaged in plans to bolster its army since the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Saudi Arabia relies heavily on oil exports despite attempts to diversify sources of income. Such exports provide more than two thirds of its income.

The kingdom, which controls more than a quarter of the world's recoverable crude reserves, is believed to have earned nearly \$8 billion in additional revenues in 1996 due to a \$3 rise in crude prices.

The finance ministry did not make clear if the forecast \$4.9 billion deficit in 1996 was wiped out or slashed because of the high oil prices.

But it said they did have a positive impact on the economy, with GDP growing by 8.7 per cent to 510 billion riyals (\$136 billion) in 1996 from 469 billion riyals (\$125 billion) in 1995.

Bankers said the 1996 growth in current prices was one of the highest growth rates recorded by Riyadh since the oil boom 15 years ago.

High oil earnings also largely improved the kingdom's balance of payments, with a current account deficit of 19.9 billion riyals (\$5.3 billion) turning into a surplus of 700 million riyals (\$186.6 million).

This was mainly due to an improvement in the trade balance caused by a sharp rise in crude sales. Non-oil exports also witnessed a moderate rise in 1996 after a large growth of 45 per cent in 1995, the finance ministry said.

Saudi Arabia produces around eight million barrels per day (bpd) of oil, nearly a quarter of the output of the 11-nation Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and 11 per cent of the world's total crude supplies.

Experts expect the OPEC-decreed quota of eight-million-bpd to be maintained through 1997 because of Iraq's return to the oil market after a six-year ban.

Algeria cuts '96 budget deficit

PARIS (R) — The Algerian government has said its belt-tightening fiscal policy yielded a 74.1 billion dinar (\$1.3 billion) cut in the 1996 budget deficit.

"In respect of the budget result for 1996, the deficit has been reduced from 99.4 billion dinars (\$1.8 billion) to 25.3 billion dinars (\$460 million)," said the cabinet in a statement carried by the official Algerian news agency APS.

The government originally forecast a provisional deficit of 31.5 billion dinars for 1996, but this was boosted to more than 99 billion dinars when authorities approved more subsidies to ailing state-owned industry.

Last month it adopted a 1997 state budget of 914.1 billion dinars with a deficit of 84.7 billion dinars.

Prime Minister Ahmad Ouyahia, quoted by APS, said the government in 1996 had pumped about 200 billion dinars into social schemes, including subsidies for housing and welfare funds.

Another 120 billion dinars had gone to help restructure non-oil and gas industry.

The authorities have been confronting a five-year-old conflict with radical fundamentalists whose ranks, according to officials, have been reinforced in the last years by young people frustrated by a 28 per cent unemployment rate and a chronic housing shortage.

Meanwhile, the Algerian government foresees inflation being brought down to seven per cent in 1997 from 16.5 per cent at the end of 1996.

The APS has reported that the government also said the programme to liberalise prices on basic consumer items had almost been completed.

Since 1995, when annual inflation hit 29 per cent, the government has been striving to shift the economy to a free market under a three-year accord with the International Monetary Fund.

Prime Minister Ouyahia said at the weekend that 1997 inflation would not top 10 per cent.

APS said the government's review showed foreign currency reserves reached \$4.23 billion in the first 11 months of the year — enough to cover four months of imports. Mr. Ouyahia had said foreign reserves at the end of 1996 stood at \$4 billion.

Lebanon's chronic budget deficit widens in 1996

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanon's chronic budget deficit soared in 1996 as expenditures outweighed revenues for another year, according to official figures.

Last year's expenditures rose 50 per cent beyond receipts, compared to 1995's expenditures of 48 per cent more than revenues.

Expenditures rose to 7.10 trillion Lebanese pounds (\$4.58 billion) in 1996, while receipts came to 3.55 trillion pounds last year.

Expenditures had been forecast to reach 6.55 billion Lebanese pounds, or

37.6 per cent more than receipts, which had been expected to reach 4.02 trillion pounds.

In 1997, expenditures are forecast at a maximum of 35.9 per cent of receipts.

The national debt in 1996 came to between \$10.5 and \$10.3 billion, according to official and bank estimates, compared to \$8.8 billion in 1995.

The debt rose at the end of November to \$10.02 billion, of which \$8.34 billion in domestic debt was borrowed from 80 banks operating in Lebanon and from the public through treasury bonds. The external debt

came to about \$1.67 billion. Budget deficits exceeding forecasts has become a chronic problem in Lebanon, with receipts coming in lower than expected and expenditure turning out higher than anticipated.

The problem is due to poor tax collection, especially from banks, large companies and the wealthy, and the looting of public money.

Increased debt service triggered by interest rate rises during every political crisis has also aggravated the deficit.

REUTERS

REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	SGD	FRF
US Dollar	1.5633	0.9943	1.3528	115.51	1.3723	1636.90	1.7538	5.2785	
DE Mark	0.6397		0.3798	0.8657	73.90	0.8781	983.11	1.1222	3.3753
GB Sterling	1.6827	2.6315		2.2751	194.38	2.3082	2588.14	2.9331	8.8907
CHF Franc	0.7392	1.1545	0.4388		85.38	1.0132	1135.42	129.58	3.8895
JP Yen	0.0087	1.3527	0.5138	1.1708		1.1871	13.29	151.72	4.5689
CA Dollar	0.7287	1.1468	0.4394	0.9793	1.19		1121.87	1.2807	3.8558
IT Lira	0.0007	1.0165	0.3882	0.0380	1332.09	0.8821		11.41	3.4355
NL Guilder	0.5703	0.8807	0.3384	77.11	65.82	0.7819	875.50		3.0089
FR Franc	0.1894	0.2980	0.1124	25.8168	21.86	0.2594	33.22	33.2200	

Energy				
Oil	Last	Previous		
Brent	24.90	24.95		
N. Texas	22.50	22.50		
Bony	24.90	24.95		
Dubai	22.35	22.03		
UL Gas	212.00	211.00		

Mid-East Currencies				
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2667	0.4170	0.15846	0.38095
AE Dirham	0.2725	0.42579	0.16116	0.38954
KW Dinar	3.3311	5.20333	1.97941	4.80357
BH Dinar	0.3768	0.614938	0.23789	0.58554
CY Pound	2.1218	3.3158	1.2811	2.8735

Metal Prices				
Metal	Bid	Offer		
Gold (ozs)	358.3	358.8		
Silver (ozs)	4.55	4.68		
Platinum (ozs)	361	362		
AL (3 Months)	1554	1557		
CU (3 Months)	2191	2194		
ZINC (3 Months)	1063	1065		
Lead (3 Months)	696	697		
NI (3 Months)	6890	6892		

Main Equity Indices				
Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng
New York	DOW JONES	6582.19	38.1	0.58
New York	S&P 500	751.57	3.54	0.47
London	FT-SE 100	4088.9	9.4	0.23
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	19446	84.85	0.44
Paris	CAC 40	2300.25	17.49	0.77
Frankfurt	DAX	2881.32	22.04	0.77

Energy				
Commodity	Last	Delivery		
Coffee (c/lbs)	120.42	Spot		
Cocoa (\$/ton)	1390	Spot		
Sugar (\$/ton)	317	Spot		
Wheat (\$/ton)	127	Spot		
Soya (c/lbs)	21.61	Spot		
Tea (c/kg)	125	Spot		
Barley (\$/sh)	2.07	Spot		
Rice (\$/ton)	470	Spot		

JOD Cross Rates				
Currency	Buy	Sell		
US Dollar	0.708	0.710		
GB Sterling	1.1981	1.2041		
DE Mark	0.4512	0.4535		
CH Franc	0.5202	0.5228		
FR Franc	0.1335	0.1342		
JP Yen	0.6064	0.6084		
NL Guilder	0.4019	0.4039		
IT Lira	0.4199	0.4222		

Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

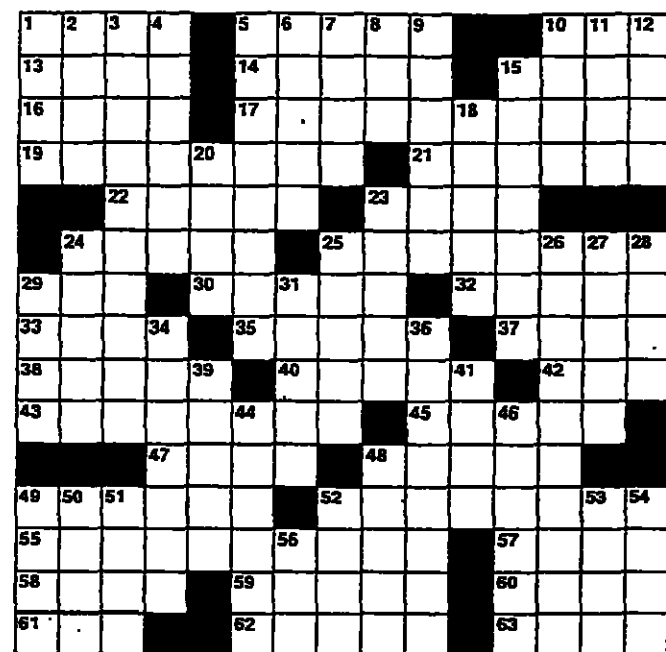
THE Daily Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Spielberg movie
- 5 Prominent man, in India
- 10 Curved wheel
- 13 "I cannot tell"
- 14 Plausible excuse
- 15 — it (amen)
- 16 Herbie or Horace
- 17 Like some suits
- 19 Furtive, perhaps
- 21 Rat on
- 22 Musical range
- 23 Philippine island
- 24 Ladd role
- 25 Bask on the beach
- 29 Gosh!
- 30 Philanthropist
- 32 "— to Be You"
- 33 Genesis name
- 35 Hospital employee
- 37 Emerald land
- 38 Louvre's location
- 40 Lamants loudly
- 42 Chess pieces
- 43 Catches in a spring
- 45 Searches thoroughly
- 47 Bar orders
- 48 True-blue
- 49 Scanty
- 52 Khartoum native
- 55 Shabby
- 57 Distant
- 58 Fasting time
- 59 Raring to go
- 60 Shore bird
- 61 Have debts
- 62 Types of pairs
- 63 Actress Sommer

DOWN

- 1 Bread spreads
- 3 Jai —
- 4 Aviation hazards
- 5 Indian tribe
- 6 Cream-filled pastry
- 7 Fashion shape
- 8 Type of chape
- 9 Babu doc. abbr.



by Diane C. Baldwin



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- 9 Stung
- 10 Egyptian
- 11 First victim
- 12 Ancient Persian
- 15 Place
- 18 Temple figure
- 20 Acreage
- 23 Expletive
- 24 Car
- 25 Tender spots
- 26 Small quail
- 27 Cottonails' kin
- 28 Tree of
- 29 Hang open
- 31 Microwaves
- 34 Mosque tower
- 36 Ciphers experts
- 38 Spicy sauce
- 41 Versatile bean
- 44 Thatched
- 46 Get by
- 48 Laid out the bait
- 49 French town
- 50 Word of disgust
- 51 English composer
- 52 Epic tale
- 53 Vaccine name
- 54 Gardner of mystery
- 55 Horse hue

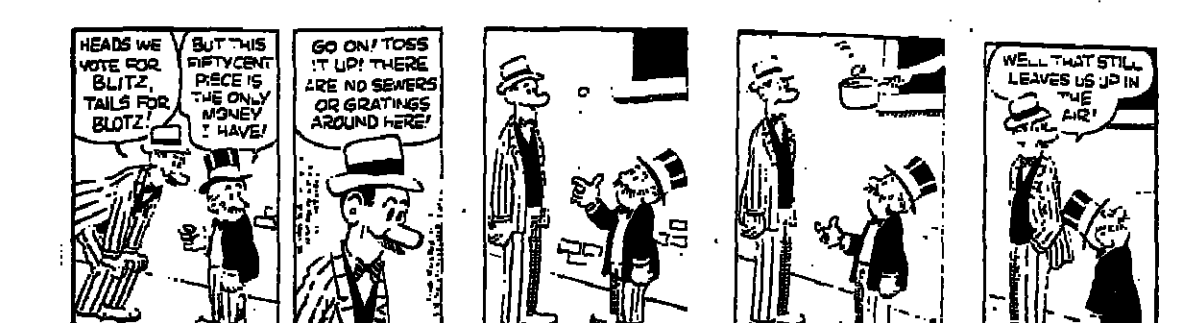
Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 1997

By Thomas S. Pierson, Astrologer, Carroll Righter Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) It is important that you are most careful today in handling your responsibilities so that you can gain the respect and admiration of those in authority. Make preparations for recreational activities you plan to do with close friends.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Count the cost well for any gifts which you give to close friends and loved ones and don't go overboard with them or you could find yourself short on funds. Later this evening will be good to go out on the town with friends.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Home situations could upset you today, if you allow this, so keep your mind on career activities and you can proceed quite nicely. Later tonight you can meet with knowledgeable people and come up with a course of action to succeed.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Take care you do not lose anything while out shopping today or you could be left out in the cold with nothing left but the shirt on your back. Listen carefully to a friend's complaint and offer some assistance.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Use care in handling finances or property today and avoid losses which could be big if you are not careful. Make sure you drive with care while on the highway later this evening so that you don't get into any difficulties.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You could be highly discontented with some personal mistake you have made today, however it is easy to rectify. Later this evening you can complete any current career activities with the assistance of fellow associates.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You are sink and tired of some situation which has long bothered you, however be patient a little longer and everything will fall into place for the better. Tonight you can relax at home and rest up for the days ahead.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Although a good friend may not agree today with a personal matter you are handling, listen carefully to what is suggested and show that you do appreciate his or her opinion. Tonight you can go out on the town with your mate.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) This is not a good day today to make any changes in your activities or difficulties could develop which you had not anticipated. Handle some civic affair carefully so that you do not get into a difficult situation.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Study further into that enterprise today which interests you before you put it into operation so you don't regret any decisions which were made. Later this evening will be good for you to consult fellow associates on a new project.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You had better postpone that talk with your mate until a better time or you could get into difficulty with him or her. Be sure to keep any promises you have made to close friend or loved ones and thereby maintain your reputation.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) All kinds of conditions arise today which can depress you if you jump into hasty conclusions, so make every effort to study the situation before you jump into head first. Listen to others for their opinion and use it if it works.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

Senior AFM officials to attend technological forum in Paris

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Amman Financial Market (AFM) will take part in the "New Exchange Technology" forum to be held Thursday in Paris. Jordan will be represented at the forum by deputy director general of the AFM, Jall Tharif, and head of the Companies' Department. The two-day meeting, organized by the Paris Bourse, will discuss the application of new technology in trading operations by using the French system and will also review the experience of countries that adopted the French model in this regard.

More than 80 countries from all over the world will participate in the forum including the U.S., EU, the Middle East, Africa and Far East countries. A technical assistance agreement had recently been signed between the Paris Bourse and the AFM, to finance a modernisation project of the AFM trading operations. The first phase of the project is already underway.

It consists of a survey of the AFM's current situation and the technical requirements for modernising the operations according to international standards.

World auto output will be 'phenomenal' in next two decades — Ward's

SOUTHFIELD, Michigan (AFP) — Worldwide vehicle production will post "phenomenal" growth over the next 20 years, most of it concentrated in newly developing countries, a leading industry analyst has predicted.

A special report by the research firm Ward's, summarised by the company Monday, said automakers will turn out 1.4 billion cars and trucks in the next 20 years, twice as many as in the previous two decades.

"The vehicle growth rate will be phenomenal," according to Max Pemberton, author of the study, entitled Ward's World Vehicle Forecasts and Strategies.

He said most of production surge will come from newly developing countries, dramatically changing the present distribution balance.

In 1995, three-quarters of the 663 million vehicles on the world's roads were in the developed world — North America, Japan,

Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

By 2015 the global fleet will reach one billion units, 59 per cent of which will be in developed countries.

Annual vehicle sales in 2015 will climb to about 92 million, with the share of sales in developed countries dropping from 74 per cent to 53 per cent, according to Ward's.

The projected growth pace will require a minimum of 160 new auto plants, each turning out 300,000 units annually.

It will create a need for more spare parts, more service and repair stations, more roads and bridges and more parking spaces.

As more vehicles are built and sold, the study said, the scrap rate will rise dramatically, especially in more developed countries where vehicle ownership is reaching the saturation point.

Roughly 1.1 billion vehicles will be disposed of between now and 2015. Ten countries were responsible for nearly 75

per cent of world vehicle sales, with three companies — General Motors, Ford and Toyota — producing about 38 per cent cars and trucks worldwide.

For every 1,000 people in the developed world, according to the report, there were 547 vehicles. In the developing world only 34 per 1,000 owned vehicles.

Three-quarters of all vehicles are owned by just 16 per cent of the world's population, Ward's said.

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic press

Government considers amending requirements for foreign investments

THE HIGHER COUNCIL for Promoting Investment has recommended to the Council of Ministers the amendment of the regulations governing non-Jordanian investments. According to Taleb Rifai, the director-general of the Investment Promotion Corporation, the Higher Council proposed reconsidering or abolishing the JD100,000 minimum amount required from non-Jordanians for investing in a project.

Dr. Rifai said that the Higher Council also recommended to the Cabinet broadening the base of exemptions and incentives to other sectors not included in the current legislation such as parks, entertainment and spa projects as well as vocational education that would serve the productive sectors of health, industry, tourism and agriculture. The recommendation mentioned the "technical production sector" as being another area that should be included in the list for receiving exemptions and incentives which currently benefit only the industrial and agricultural sectors in addition to hotels, hospitals and some transport sections.

Under the proposals submitted, areas that enjoy 25 per cent and 50 per cent exemptions will be enjoying 50 per cent and 75 per cent exemptions respectively, Dr. Rifai revealed (Al Rai).

Sobar declares 1997 as year for liberalising prices

1997 WILL BE the year of liberalising prices, Supply Minister Munir Sobar has announced adding that the government will be floating the prices of 86 products. He said that the government has allowed the private sector to import products, especially grains, which were only imported by the ministry in the past. The private sector will be allowed to import other products without (prior) permits in the near future, the minister pointed out.

Mr. Sobar said that there is no timetable or programme to liberalise prices but "the government will seize the right opportunity to liberalise the prices of any product that becomes in ample supply (more than demand) and does not suffer of any marketing bottlenecks." He stressed that the "liberalisation" will include everything beginning with meat and up to the school dresses and noted that "all indications show that 1997 will witness price stability and, consequently, it will be the right time to liberalise prices."

The minister said that the reduction in the prices of bread has saved the public about JD 12 million a year. He added that a new mechanism will be unveiled next week to liberalise cigarette prices after putting fixed specifications to import "good" qualities (Al Rai).

UAE creates venture for first Arab phone satellite

ABU DHABI (AFP) — The United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Monday announced the creation of a joint venture that will own and operate the first telephone satellite in the Middle East.

The Thuraya (chandelier) Company for Space Telecommunication has an initial capital of \$25 million, which will be raised to nearly \$500 million, project manager Hatem Lutfi told reporters.

He spoke after shareholders from the UAE and other Arab states held their first meeting in Abu Dhabi and agreed to subscribe the initial capital.

Etisalat, the UAE's sole telecommunications firm, controls 26 per cent of the venture while 20 per cent is owned by the government-run Abu Dhabi Investment Company, 10 per cent by the Arab Space Satellite Corporation (Arabsat) and the rest by investors from other Arab countries.

The German telecommunications company Detecon was offered 0.5 per cent ownership as it is the consultant for the project.

Mr. Lutfi said more investors would be invited from India and other Asian countries as well as Europe, most of which will be covered by the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMC) satellite.

"The \$25 million we agreed on today is considered the founding capital of the company. The capital will be raised gradually this year and it could reach \$500 million within a year," he said.

Mr. Lutfi declined to mention the cost of the project but sources from Etisalat and the bidding companies put it at between \$700 million and one billion dollars.

He said four companies from France and the United States were competing for the contract and the bids would be opened on Feb. 1.

Bidders for the satellite project, one of the biggest telecommunications contracts in the Middle East, include Aerospatiale and Alcatel Telecom of France and Hughes and Lockheed of the United States.

Thuraya, the fifth of its kind in the world, could include two satellites covering the Middle East, eastern Europe, North Africa, central Asia and the subcontinent. It will be launched before the year 2000, officials said.

State-controlled Etisalat, one of the biggest telecommunications firms in the region, has already earmarked around \$28 million dirhams (\$225 million) for the project as part of a multi-billion-dollar investment programme to expand services to meet growing demand.

The UAE, a major oil producer, is the first Arab country that will have its own satellite but it is already a key shareholder in Arabsat, which has satellites in orbit and is planning to launch more this year.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET											
HOUSING BANK CENTER - AMMAN - JORDAN											
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179											
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR MONDAY 06/01/1997											
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	PAST 12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P/E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE	
259.500	205.000	ARAB BANK	13.9	1.37	14	1500	381824	251.00	255.00	4.00+	
1.220	880	MID. EAST INV. BK.	74.9	0.00	90	146413	165114	1.12	1.14	.02+	
5.250	4.250	THE HOUSING BK.	12.6	2.92	6	196960	931623	4.79	4.73	.06-	
2.950	2.440	JOR. KINATZ BANK	18.9	0.00	10	9759	25377	2.61	2.61	-	
1.090	0.880	JOR. GULF BANK	5.6	7.22	3	5000	4890	.97	.97	-	
4.180	3.480	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	17.7	0.00	7	1220	4866	3.67	3.69	.02+	
3.000	1.380	UNION BK. SAV. INV.	9	0.00	1	500	725	1.45	1.45	-	
1.480	1.000	PHILADEL. INV. BK.	9	0.00	8	3681	4785	1.31	1.30	.01-	
BANK SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 194.78	CHNG: +1.09	139	365133	1519165				
2.830	1.830	JOR. FRENCH INSUR.	5.3	10.58	4	1300	2460	1.90	1.89	.01-	
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 120.45	CHNG: -0.05	4	1300	2460				
1.830	1.450	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	11.3	7.36	15	18925	30847	1.63	1.63	-	
1.560	1.250	IRSID ELECTRICITY	9.6	6.80	1	400	588	1.46	1.47	.01+	
2.700	2.280	RISH HIBERALS	12.3	5.60	1	500	1250	2.60	2.50	.10-	
5.850	4.200	ARAB INTL. HOTELS	18.8	2.70	3	14100	69975	4.90	4.75	.15-	
1.780	1.080	NATL. PORTFOLIO	9	0.00	10	3200	3821	1.19	1.20	.01+	
.800	.410	MACH. REP. REPT. MAIN.	9	0.00	1	100	45	.43	.45	.02+	
1.200	1.450	MID. EAST HOTELS	68.1	0.00	10	9750	9164	1.63	1.58	.05-	
1.250	.950	SABRA EDUCATION	9	0.00	2	1600	1665	1.04	1.04	-	
2.310	1.620	UNIFIED CO.	11.3	4.65	68	43350	92788	2.11	2.15	.04+	
1.200	.890	UNION LAND DEV.	8	0.00	5	5900	5025	.88	.85	.03-	
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 113.95	CHNG: -0.85	116	93825	215167				
1.280	1.010	ATTACHEE	9	0.00	1	1000	1000	1.01	1.00	.01-	
3.730	3.050	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	19.2	2.99	8	3301	11093	3.37	3.35	.02-	
3.500	2.710	JOR. PROSPERITY MILES	35.2	0.00	1	200	654	3.17	3.27	.10+	
6.000	4.950	ARAB POTASH CO.	17.1	3.54	2	250	1397	5.70	5.65	.05-	
10.400	8.720	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.0	8.10	2	4940	4940	9.70	9.88	.18+	
3.750	1.650	INDUSTRIAL COM. AGR.	36.7	0.00	2	130	353	2.74	2.73	.01-	
4.730	3.040	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	19.4	5.65	9	2218	7850	3.58	3.84	.04+	
3.360	1.570	JOR. PIPES MANFCT.	9.1	7.32	4	900	1480	1.65	1.64	.01-	
7.700	4.250	JOR. ALUMIN. IND.	13.3	4.12	3	950	4608	4.90	4.85	.05-	
5.800	3.130	ARAB ALUM. IND.	9.1	8.22	2	57	207	3.65	3.65	-	
.960	.450	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	9	0.00	43	54200	34146	.63	.64	.01+	
1.440	1.060	ARAB PAPER CO. TRD.	8.1	9.70	29	22000	26200	1.19	1.19	-	
1.680	1.180	NATIONAL STEEL IND.	9	0.00	4	13300	16492	1.18	1.24	.06+	
1.050	.540	NATIONAL INDS.	10.2	8.70	30	27250	18597	.68	.69	.01+	
1.690	.930	INTERMED. PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	37	17050	19072	1.10	1.11	.01+	
1.150	.780	JOR. ROCCOCCI INDS.	9	0.00	3	900	738	.86	.82	.04-	
1.780	1.080	ARAB PHARM. CHEM.	26.8	0.00	22	13550	19226	1.44	1.43	.01-	
3.260	1.440	UNIV. MOD. INDS.	5.3	12.43	4	1023	1790	1.75	1.75	-	
2.000	1.140	JOR. INDS. RESOURCES	16.3	0.00	10	1940	2521	1.30	1.30	-	
1.420	.850	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	25.3	0.00	30	26500	25094	.94	.94	-	
2.460	1.750	EL -DAY READY WEAR	9	0.00	5	1386	6465	1.91	1.91	-	
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 114.07	CHNG: -0.02	279	195103	247823				
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Patriots trounce Steelers to reach AFC championship game

FOXBORO (R) — Curtis Martin sliced through the fog for 165 yards and three touchdowns as the New England Patriots beat the Pittsburgh Steelers 28-3 on Sunday, leaving them one victory away from the Super Bowl.

Drew Bledsoe was 14-of-24 for 164 yards and a score for the Patriots (12-5), who dominated the defending American Football Conference champions on both sides of the ball and won a post-season game for the first time in 11 years.

The winner of next week's AFC championship game, between the Patriots and the Jacksonville Jaguars, who beat the Denver Broncos 30-27 on Saturday, will go to Super Bowl XXXI in New Orleans on January 26.

The Steelers (11-7) had reached the AFC title game in each of the last two seasons and appeared headed for a third after last week's 40-14 rout of Indianapolis.

But New England scored touchdowns on three of its first four possessions, leaving the Steelers lost in the fog and trying to find their way out by alternating quarterbacks Mike Tomczak and Kordell Stewart throughout the game.

Tomczak was 16-of-29 for 110 yards and two interceptions and Stewart, who constantly fled the pocket to scramble or throw, was 0-of-10. With fullback Jerome Bettis slowed by a nagging groin injury, Pittsburgh was never able to mount a viable offence, and the Patriots manhandled and often simply fooled the Steelers' defence.

Martin, who was born and raised in Pittsburgh and attended the University of Pittsburgh, carried 19 times, including touchdown runs of two, 78 and 23 yards. He gave the Patriots what the Steelers needed from Bettis, who managed just 43 yards on 13 carries.

Bledsoe opened the game with two key completions that put the Patriots ahead by two touchdowns. He seemed to use radar to find Terry Glenn with a 53-yard bomb on new England's opening play, setting up a two-yard touchdown plunge by Martin.

New England easily moved the ball on the next series. Bledsoe, who completed his first seven passes, set up a screen to running back Keith Byars, who rumbled 34 yards for the second score.



Pittsburgh Steelers running back Jerome Bettis is brought down by defensive end Willie McGinest (R) of the New England Patriots in fourth quarter AFC Semifinal Playoff action in Foxboro, Massachusetts. The injured Bettis was held to 43 yards, as the Patriots defeated the Steelers 28-3 to advance to the AFC Championship game against the Jacksonville Jaguars next week (Reuters photo)

Martin struck again on New England's first offensive play of the second quarter. The second-year running back ran a perfect draw, bursting through the secondary for a 78-yard touchdown.

Martin ran for 110 yards on 10 carries in the opening half, becoming only the second back this season to run for over 100 yards against Pittsburgh's defence.

"I was so pumped before the game that the coaches were worried about me being able to focus," Martin said. "The offensive line played great and their defence was a step back."

The first seven times the Steelers had the ball, the New England defence shut down the Pittsburgh attack, bringing on punter Josh Miller to end each possession.

"They didn't have that

much zap after it was 14-0," said Patriots' running back Keith Byars. "We controlled the line of scrimmage and got to the end zone early."

Pittsburgh's offence stalled badly on its three series in the first quarter. The Steelers earned only one first down against a punishing New England defence, which stuffed Stewart on a key 3rd-and-1 run. Stewart came on for Tomczak after Pittsburgh fell behind by three touchdowns.

The only bright spot in the half for the Steelers came on a 4th-and-5 when upback Fred McAfee took the snap and dashed 10 yards around right tackle for a Pittsburgh first down near midfield. But New England responded with an aggressive stand that resulted in a pair of sacks of Tomczak, and yet another punt by Miller.

Willie Williams came up with a late first-half interception of Bledsoe, but Pittsburgh failed to convert on a 4th-and-4 screen pass.

An interception by line-backer Chad Brown set up a 29-yard field goal by Pittsburgh's Norm Johnson with 3:50 to play in the third quarter. But Lawyer Milloy intercepted Tomczak on Pittsburgh's next possession.

Martin had two seven-yard runs before exploding off right tackle and capping his big day with a 23-yard TD run, giving the pats a 28-3 lead with 12:31 remaining.

"Maybe the fog and the weather bothered them," said Patriots' coach Bill Parcells. "They don't seem to play well on the road or on grass and all that helped to unsettle them when we got ahead."

Juventus, AC Milan have miserable start to '97

MILAN (AFP) — Juventus coach Marcello Lippi and AC Milan's Arrigo Sacchi both woke up with a New Year hang-over on Monday, after their sides made a miserable start to 1997.

Juventus and Parma both had two men sent off in Sunday's bruising 1-0 defeat for the European Cup holders, while Milan were crushed 3-0 in the Olympic stadium by Lazio.

Lippi described the refereeing as "perfect", in an apparently ironic verdict on Piero Ceccarini's afternoon, but was clearly dismayed by Parma's rough house tactics.

"The match was dragged down by certain players to a level which someone else may have wanted — but we certainly didn't," he said.

"Someone wanted it to be a brawl for half the time, and it wasn't us."

Lippi also rounded on those who had claimed that Juventus' pre-Christmas six-point lead had left everybody behind.

"I've never talked about such things," he fumed. "If we win a match, we're leaving everyone behind, but if we lose one, it means we're grounded. Be serious, please."

Sacchi was clearly in serious mood as he reflected on Milan's second consecutive league defeat, and the painful transition from Oscar Tabarez's unhappy term as coach.

"We are still not there mentally or in terms of character," Sacchi said. "We had a lot of players unavailable, and we weren't in top condition. All this made things more complicated for us."

"Milan did not have the strength needed as a team. We've got to be more determined in defence, a bit more nasty

when it comes to stopping people. "Instead, we are still fragile and end up getting beaten. And the defeats never help — they only create tension and demoralise people."

Dejan Savicevic, once the toast of San Siro, was clearly in the demoralised camp after a particularly poor display. "It's Milan's worst period of the past 10 years," he said. "I can't remember things ever being this bad."

But if there was seasonal gloom over AC Milan's headquarters here, there was a ray of sunshine over Inter's HQ, just a few streets away.

The 3-1 win over AS Roma and Youri Djorkaeff's acrobatic candidate for goal of the season — which earned him a standing ovation — brought fresh hope to a side which had been losing it's way.

"The referee asked me for my shirt afterwards, but I said 'another time.' I'm keeping this one. I don't remember ever scoring such a great goal."

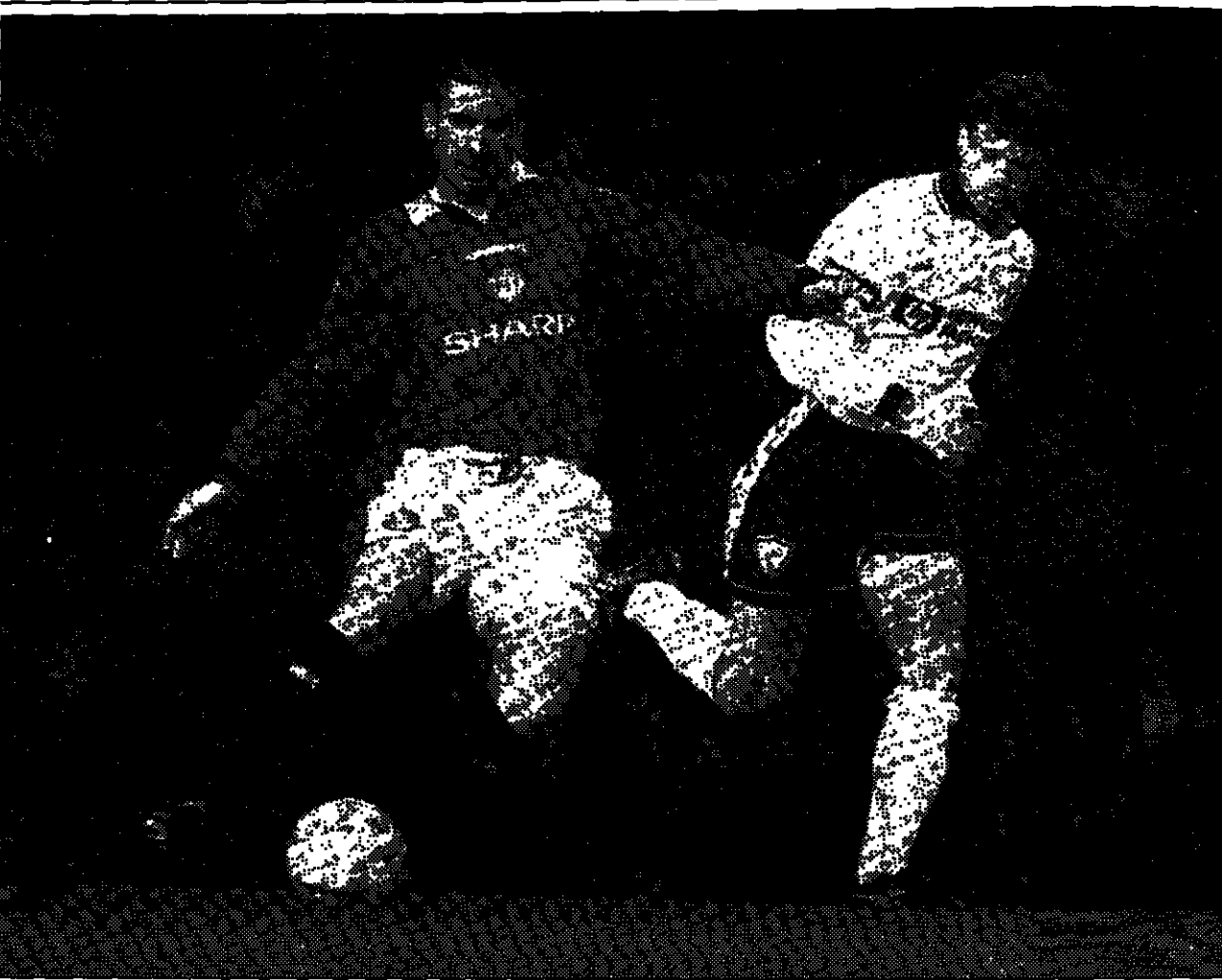
The former Paris St Germain star didn't see the ball go in. "But I heard the roar of the crowd. It sounded like the whole of the San Siro was caving in on me."

And the Frenchman insisted: "The league title is still within reach."

Vicenza may be second in the table, three points behind Juventus, but coach Francesco Guidolin is more concerned about avoiding relegation than winning the "scudetto."

"If we play like we know we can, we're a danger for any side," he said.

"But for the moment, we're not thinking about being second so much as being nine points in front of the club who are fourth from bottom."



Manchester United captain Eric Cantona (L) is challenged by Tottenham Hotspur captain David Howells (Reuters photo)

United brush aside Spurs on road to Wembley

LONDON (AFP) — Manchester United are on course for an FA Cup showdown with high-flying Wimbledon after an ultimately comfortable 2-0 win over a Tottenham side missing several star players at old Trafford on Sunday.

Goals from Paul Scholes and David Beckham fired the holders into a fourth round clash home with Wimbledon — shock winners over Liverpool in 1988 — who must first see off second division Crewe Alexandra next week.

"We're looking forward to it," said United boss Alex Ferguson. "They are always up for it on the big occasion and Joe Kinnear has got them playing really well this season."

Scholes gave United the lead on 51 minutes when he latched onto a pass from Andy Cole on the edge of the Spurs area before sweeping a low shot into the bottom right-hand corner for his fourth goal of the season.

The goal settled United's nerves after they were earlier made to struggle by a patchwork Spurs side missing, among others, Teddy Sheringham, Steven Iversen, Chris Armstrong, Darren Anderton, John Scales and Gary Mabbutt.

The visitors, who were beaten 7-1 by Newcastle last week, created a number of chances before United put the match out of reach with a brilliant curling free-kick from England star Beckham eight minutes from time.

"It was a lovely strike from Beckham. He struck it beautifully,"

said Ferguson.

United nearly broke the deadlock in the 26th minute, when David Beckham's perfectly judged cross from the right was met by the head of Ryan Giggs, whose powerful effort was beaten out by Ian Walker in the Spurs goal.

Frustrations started to boil over in the midfield where United's resident hot-head Roy Keane, who had already conceded several free-kicks, was booked for a clumsy challenge on Justin Edinburgh.

The first half ended with an ugly scrap in the Spurs goalmouth after United's Andy Cole clashed with Scotland defender Colin Calderwood. Both men were booked.

Despite their makeshift line-up, Spurs succeeded in matching United chance for chance in the first half with Andy Sinton curling a 20-yard shot just wide and captain David Howells going agonisingly close with a deflected free-kick.

But their best chance, after 65 minutes, fell to 19-year-old striker Neale Fenn, who saw his shot squeeze inches past the wrong side of the upright after a good cross from Steve Carr.

Earlier, Mark Kinsella ruined Robert Lee's homecoming with a stunning late equaliser that earned Charlton athletic an FA Cup replay with Premiership giants Newcastle at the Valley.

Newcastle were on course for a place in the fourth round after England midfielder Lee fired them into a first-half lead.

But 11 minutes from time, Kinsella burst from midfield and unleashed a ferocious drive from 25 yards which flew into the top right hand corner of Shaka Hislop's goal.

It was an unhappy end to an emotional day for Lee on his return to the club where he spent ten years before being sold to Newcastle in 1992 for 700,000 pounds. The cash from the deal allowed Charlton to return to their famous ground.

Ironically, both Lee and Kinsella are suspended for the replay on January 15, and Newcastle boss Kevin Keegan pointed the finger firmly at his keeper. "They had just one shot and scored from it, and Shaka knows he should have got it. It went straight through him," said Keegan, who said his team had "stopped playing" after the break.

Everton, 1995 cup winners, cruised into the fourth round after a 3-0 victory over first division Swindon, who finished the match with just nine men.

Swindon were reduced to 10 men after just a minute when Ian Culverhouse was dismissed for handling in the area — the quickest dismissal in FA Cup history — and then lost Gary Elkins after 74 minutes for a second bookable offence.

Andre Kanchelskis with a penalty, England striker Nick Barmby and Scotland striker Duncan Ferguson were the goalscorers in a comfortable victory.

In the day's other tie, first division strugglers Bradford City beat second division strugglers Wycombe 2-0.

Real beat Athletic to retake Spanish League lead

MADRID (R) — Real Madrid regained their lead in the Spanish first division on Sunday thanks to a solitary goal from teenager Raul Gonzalez in the snow-affected game against Athletic Bilbao.

With 42 points from 18 games Real are two points ahead of arch-rivals Barcelona, 1-0 winners at third-placed Deportivo Coruna on Saturday.

Real had the best of the game but were somewhat fortunate to take three points as Raul's 61st-minute winner took a lucky deflection.

The game could be played only

because of the effectiveness of the undersoil heating in the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on a day when Madrid neighbours Rayo Vallecano saw their game with Sevilla postponed because of snow.

The club authorities at one stage had to appeal to fans to stop bombarding players and match officials with snowballs.

The other Madrid team, champions Atletico, came home 4-2 winners from struggling Extremadura after being put on their way by a goal by Daniel Prodan, the Romanian interna-

tional who was making his Spanish first division debut.

Two fine goals from striker Kiko Narvaez sealed the game for Atletico, who went 4-0 up before a late recovery from the home side.

Atletico stayed fifth, 10 points off the pace and three points behind Real Betis who play Valencia on Monday.

Real Sociedad remained sixth thanks to a last-gasp winner against Zaragoza. The defeat left Zaragoza fourth from bottom just 20 months after taking the 1995 European Cup Winners' Cup.

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PHILADELPHIA "2"

Richard Gere, Sian Connery
& Julia Ormond....in

FIRST KNIGHT

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:699238
PLAZA

* The Hunchback of
Notre Dame

Shows: 12:00, 1:30, 5:00

* RANSOM

Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

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CONCORD

CONCORD "1"
Silvester Stallone & Curt Russell...in

TANGO & CASH

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30

CONCORD "2"
Dumb and Dumber

Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

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of the Holy Month of
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for a new play entitled
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able start to '97

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Spain captain David Howell

le Spurs nbley

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Theatre is closed from
15, 1996 until the start
of the Holy Month of
adan in order to prepare
a new play entitled
I Aman Ya Ho



San Ivanisevic

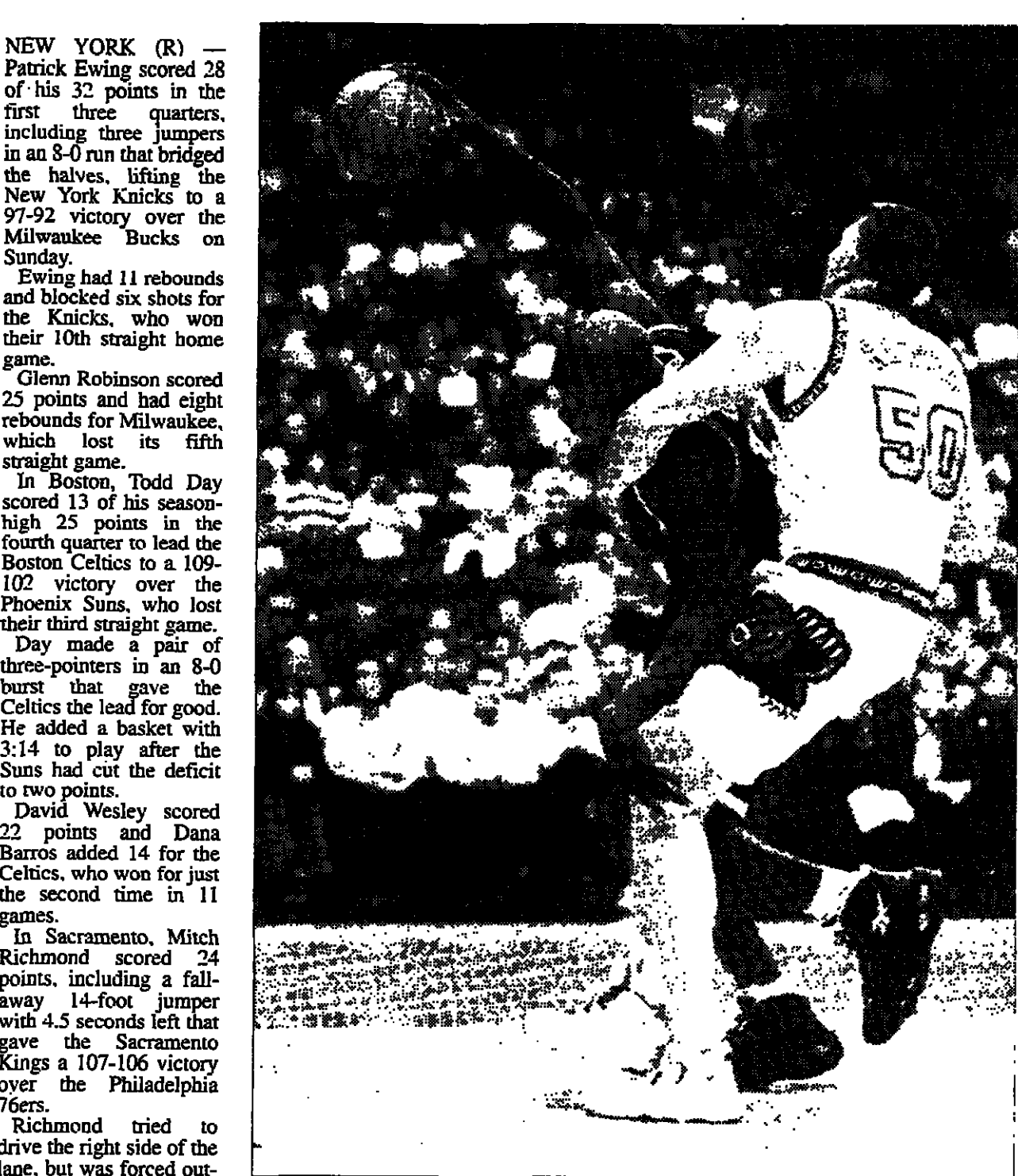
ave my serve alone, says Ivanisevic

SYDNEY (AFP) — Goran Ivanisevic came out against radical to limit tennis play- one serve in an to speed up the the Volatile Croat with projectile left-handed thundered down a remarkable 1,477 aces in 96 matches on last year's Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) tour and is against any attempt to blunt his main weapon. Ivanisevic, who heads into next week's Australian Open in Melbourne as world number three behind Pete Sampras and Michael Chang, started his 1997 season with a straight sets victory over Marc-Kevin Goellner of Germany in the first round of the Sydney International here Monday. The 25-year-old, sporting a moustache and longer hair than last season, picked off the 51st-ranked Goellner, 6-3, 6-4. Asked his reaction to attempts to introduce regulations to halve the serves from the time-honoured two per point, Ivanisevic said

Sykora takes risks to notch up treble

KRANJSKA GORA, Slovenia, (AFP) — Thomas Sykora made it three-out-of-three in slalom racing when he dared all to win a men's world cup race here on Monday. He beat Frenchman Sebastien Amiez and fellow Austrian Thomas Stangassinger for his first win at Kranjska Gora, and the first by an Austrian in 13 years. Sykora, who won the season's opening slalom at Park City, USA, also won at Madonna Di Campiglio, Italy, before the Christmas break. The World Cup slalom leader was a tenth of a second slower than Stangassinger, the 1994 Olympic champion, after the first run but took risks through the mist to win by four tenths in an aggregate time of 1min 41.93sec. Amiez, last year's World Cup slalom champion, moved from third to second in 1:42.29. Stangassinger timed 1:42.34. Matt Grosjean of the United States improved from eighth after the first run by setting the second-fastest time in the second leg to finish in a personal best fourth place in 1:42.49. World and Olympic champion Alberto Tomba of Italy, who has been in the first three here five times, finished eighth.

Ewing leads Knicks to victory



Vancouver Grizzlies' Bryant Reeves (R) ties up Los Angeles Lakers' center Shaquille O'Neal (R) as he drives to the basket during the first quarter of their NBA game in Vancouver (Reuters photo)

NEW YORK (R) — Patrick Ewing scored 28 of his 32 points in the first three quarters, including three jumpers in an 8-0 run that bridged the halves, lifting the New York Knicks to a 97-92 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Sunday. Ewing had 11 rebounds and blocked six shots for the Knicks, who won their 10th straight home game. Glenn Robinson scored 25 points and had eight rebounds for Milwaukee, which lost its fifth straight game. In Boston, Todd Day scored 13 of his season-high 25 points in the fourth quarter to lead the Boston Celtics to a 109-102 victory over the Phoenix Suns, who lost their third straight game. Day made a pair of three-pointers in an 8-0 burst that gave the Celtics the lead for good. He added a basket with 3:14 to play after the Suns had cut the deficit to two points. David Wesley scored 22 points and Dana Barros added 14 for the Celtics, who won for just the second time in 11 games. In Sacramento, Mitch Richmond scored 24 points, including a fall-away 14-foot jumper with 4.5 seconds left that gave the Sacramento Kings a 107-106 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers. Richmond tried to drive the right side of the lane, but was forced outside and sank the winning shot. Philadelphia's Allen Iverson, who scored just one of his 16 points in the final 18 minutes, missed an off-balance jumper off the backboard from 16 feet at the buzzer. Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf had 25 points for Sacramento. In San Antonio, Pooh Richardson scored all 11 of his points in the fourth quarter, including three three-pointers, and Lorenzen Wright had 16 points and 11 rebounds, leading the Los Angeles Clippers to their third straight victory, 93-84 over the San Antonio Spurs. Malik Sealy had 15 points and Loy Vaught added 14 and 11 rebounds for the Clippers. The Clippers missed all nine of their three-point attempts in the first three quarters but connected on 6-of-8 from beyond the arc in the final quarter. Vernon Maxwell scored 23 points and Sean Elliott added 17 for the Spurs. In Vancouver, Shaquille O'Neal had 31 points and 12 rebounds and Nick Van Exel handed out a career-high 23 assists as the Los Angeles Lakers used a game-ending 13-3 run to post their sixth straight win, a 95-82 victory over the Vancouver Grizzlies. Eddie Jones had 21 points and Kobe Bryant added 16 for the Lakers. The Lakers held a three-point edge with 4:01 remaining before a layup by Byron Scott and a dunk by Van Exel made it 86-79 with 2:48 to play. The Grizzlies are a league-worst 6-27.

NBA STANDINGS

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB
Miami	24	8	.750	-
New York	23	9	.719	1
Washington	16	15	.516	7 1/2
Orlando	11	17	.393	11
New Jersey	8	21	.276	14 1/2
Philadelphia	8	23	.258	15 1/2
Boston	7	23	.233	16
Central Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB
Chicago	28	4	.875	-
Detroit	24	7	.774	3 1/2
Cleveland	21	10	.677	6 1/2
Atlanta	18	11	.621	8 1/2
Charlotte	17	14	.548	10 1/2
Milwaukee	15	16	.484	12 1/2
Indiana	14	16	.467	13
Toronto	10	21	.323	17 1/2
Western Conference				
Midwest Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB
Houston	24	8	.750	-
Utah	23	8	.742	1/2
Minnesota	14	18	.438	10
Dallas	10	19	.345	12 1/2
San Antonio	9	21	.300	14
Denver	8	23	.258	15 1/2
Vancouver	6	27	.182	18 1/2
Pacific Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB
La Lakers	25	9	.735	-
Seattle	23	11	.676	2
Portland	18	15	.545	6 1/2
Sacramento	14	20	.412	11
La Clippers	13	19	.406	11
Golden State	12	18	.400	11
Phoenix	10	22	.313	14

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Cracks chip away at Olympic stadium

ATLANTA (AFP) — Five months after the end of the centennial Olympics, the Games' main stadium has major cracks on the ground level and chips deep into the upper deck concrete. No cause of the damage has been determined, nor has it been decided who will pay for repairs in the facility before baseball's Atlanta Braves begin play there March 29 in an exhibition game. The 85,000-seat stadium is being converted into a 49,800-seat baseball park. The track where Michael Johnson won his legendary double has already been ripped out. Concrete in some areas cracked because puddles of water collected beneath nearby drains that were too high. Some whole slabs of concrete must be replaced. Other cracks will be filled. Richard Monteilh, executive director of the Games group charged with ensuring the quality of Olympic sites, called the cracks "superficial wounds."

Wilkinson to develop English soccer

LONDON (AFP) — Howard Wilkinson, sacked after eight years with Leeds United in September, has accepted the job as the English Football Association's new technical director. The 53-year-old will oversee the development of talent at football's grass-roots level. The FA wanted a professional for this newly-created role and Wilkinson fits the bill with 35 years experience as player, coach and manager. Wilkinson has been prepared to change with the times in football, abandoning the long-ball game reputation he gained at Sheffield Wednesday for the flair of players like Gordon Strachan and Gary McAllister at Leeds.

Carson all set to retire after classics

LONDON (R) — Veteran Willie Carson, who has won the Epsom Derby four times, is all set to retire this year after completing his comeback from life-threatening injury. It

Nagano governor slips up in protocol

TOKYO (AFP) — The governor of Nagano, host to the 1998 winter Olympic Games, slipped up in his Olympian protocol Monday by calling speed skating a race by "beetles on a whirlingig." Goro Yoshimura, who also serves as vice chairman of the Nagano Olympic organising committee, made the remark when he was asked about his personal opinions on winter sports in a meeting with reporters in Nagano. "What's not interesting is speed skating because two skaters just skate around on a track," the 70-year-old governor was quoted as saying by the Kyodo News Agency.

Australian jockeys fined for strike

SYDNEY (R) — The Australian jockey club stewards fined three Sydney riders on Monday for a weekend strike which left apprentices grabbing glory on the nation's race courses. The AJC, which runs the sport in New South Wales state, fined jockeys John Marshall, Aaron Kennedy and Craig Carmody A\$500 (\$395) for each ride missed at a Sydney racecourse on Saturday under a rule that jockeys can be penalised for not fulfilling commitments without just cause. Marshall was penalised a total of A\$2,500 and Kennedy and Carmody were fined A\$1,000 each.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANIAH HIRSH

ANSWERS TO WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

Q. 1 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAJ98 Q76 OKJ952 48
The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1c Pass 1s Pass
2c Pass 2s Pass
What do you bid now?
A - In support of spades, your hand reveals to 13 points. (Once a fit has been found, your singleton club becomes an asset.) Since a jump to three spades would not be forcing, you must jump to four spades to tell partner of your strength.

Q. 2 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
AK87 QAK82 Q988 4AJ5
Partner opens the bidding with one diamond. What do you respond?
A - There is a textbook bid that describes your hand exactly — a jump to three no trump. That shows a hand with specifically 4-3-3-3 shape and 18-19 points. Don't let your good four-card major blind you to the most descriptive response.

Q. 3 - East-West vulnerable, as South you hold:
AA1076 Q68 Q874 4AKQ
The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1c Pass 1s Pass
2c Pass 2s Pass
What do you bid now?
A - The one bid we would eliminate in four diamonds — that bypasses three no trump. The other choices are a cue-bid of three hearts to ask partner to bid three no trump with a stopper, or a "flaky" bid of three clubs. We lean toward the latter — though only by hair.

Q. 4 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
4768 Q98 QAJ88 4QJ87
The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1c Pass 1s Pass
2c Pass 2s Pass
What action do you take?
A - In the modern style, partner's reverse is a one-round force. Even if your methods permit a pass, with seven high-card points and fair intermediate spots South's hand is certainly worth another bid. Since all the values are in the minor suits, two no trump is the obvious rebid.

Q. 5 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAJ953 Q98 QAKJ8 4J4
The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1c Pass 1s Pass
2c Pass 2s Pass
What action do you take?
A - You are in the slam zone, and your hand, being unbalanced, is better for suit play. Continue probing for a fit by bidding four diamonds.

Q. 6 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAJ953 Q98 QAKJ8 4J4
The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1c Pass 1s Pass
2c Pass 2s Pass
What do you bid now?
A - Partner is denying holding three cards in spades or four in diamonds, and wants to play no trump — North isn't asking for aces. With an honor in both hearts and clubs, we would make one more try by bidding five no trump.

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Saddam assails Arabs for joining anti-Iraq coalition

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — President Saddam Hussein on Monday attacked Arab states which fought Iraq in the 1991 Gulf war and his official press said his army survived the war to defeat a U.S. plot to divide the country.

"What have they (Arabs) gained except increased weakness and foreigners pillaging Arab resources?" the Iraqi leader asked in a speech to mark the creation of the army in 1921.

"The decision to put their armies under the orders of the United States was neither nationalistic nor patriotic. They did it on the instructions of the United States and to serve American interests," he said.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states as well as Egypt, Morocco and Syria joined the multinational coalition led by the United States which drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait in February 1991 after seven months of occupation.

President Saddam urged these countries to return to the "right path which serves the interests of the Arab Nation" and asked why they maintained a hostile stand despite the liberation of Kuwait.

"Why all the bitterness and the plots against Iraq while the Iraqi army left Kuwait," he said.

He suggested Arab leaders also ignored documents he had produced showing Kuwait was plotting with the United States against Iraq before the Iraqi army invaded the neighbouring state on Aug. 2, 1990.

President Saddam brought up criticisms of him by Arab leaders for his declaration, before the invasion of Kuwait, that all Arab states should act together against any one of them that attacked a fellow Arab country.

He said he had made the statement, but that Arab leaders who are using his



Saddam Hussein: 'Why did not plots stop?'

own words against him failed to remember the background to his comment, which at the time was directed at Syria, Iraq's longtime enemy.

"If (Arab leaders) were honest, they should remember... who was invading an Arab land," said President Saddam, referring to Syria and Lebanon.

Iraq supported Lebanon's Christian General Michel Aoun who launched a "war of liberation" against the Syrian army in 1989 before being defeated in 1990.

Baghdad says that the United States and Israel benefit most from Iraq's isolation among Arab states, with Washington able to impose its presence in the region and Israel imposing its will over Arab countries.

Meanwhile, the official press paid tribute to the army.

"The Iraqi army's prowess during operations in northern Iraq (Kurdistan) revealed the weakness of evil powers who were trying to carry out a criminal plot to dismember Iraq," the official Al Thawra daily said.

Iraqi troops helped Kurdish guerrillas capture the city of Erbil from rivals on Aug. 31, giving Iraq a foothold in the area for the first time since the 1991 Gulf war and forcing Washington to evacuate

Iraqi opposition members.

"Our troops had the honour of defeating this plot, which led the United States to attack Iraq," the official Baath Party newspaper said.

Washington "only reaped a crushing military and political defeat," it added.

In retaliation for the Iraqi incursion into Kurdish safe havens, U.S. forces fired two rounds of cruise missiles at air defense systems in southern Iraq in September and expanded a no-fly zone in the region.

The official Al Jumhuriyah newspaper said "the Iraqi army unmasked the suspect aims of the United States." But the Iraqi military remains a shadow of its former self following its defeat in the Gulf war and more than five years of U.N. efforts to dismantle its programmes for weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles.

A new team of U.N. weapons experts was due to arrive in Baghdad Monday to search for parts belonging to banned long-range missiles, U.N. officials said.

The U.N. Security Council last month urged Iraq to stop preventing U.N. inspectors from transferring nearly 130 engines for Soviet-made Scud missiles to the United States for study.

The analysis would allow the U.N. to deduce how many Scuds Iraq retained after determining whether the engines now stockpiled at U.N. offices in Baghdad were imported from Russia or made in Iraq.

In the speech on Monday, President Saddam praised Arab states that have pushed for ending U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of neighbouring Kuwait.

President Saddam wore a blue military uniform for the speech. He did not mention by name the Arab countries he addressed.



FATEH DAY: A Palestinian young man plays the part of a "martyr" as he is carried wrapped in a Palestinian flag on Monday through a crowd assembled in the Islamic University grounds in Hebron. Hundreds of Palestinians gathered to mark "Fateh Day," the anniversary of the founding of the mainstream Palestinian group that Palestinian President Yasser Arafat founded on Jan. 1, 1964. Celebrations for Fateh Day were held in other West Bank towns and in the Gaza Strip on different days (Reuters photo)

Israel may cancel some PNC visas

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said on Monday that Damascus' endorsement of an Arab statement criticising Iran for deploying missiles in the Gulf region would not create friction between them.

"Iran and Syria have a long-standing and all-embracing relationship and we still believe that our cooperation is very important for the Arab and Islamic Worlds as well as the resistance against Israeli aggressions," Mr. Velayati told a press conference.

"We have to avoid any plague to this solidarity and we have always witnessed Syria taking effort to do so," he said.

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The signatories to the so-called Damascus Declaration affirmed the UAE's right to the sovereignty of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb and urged Iran to end its "occupation" of the islands.

They also said Tehran posed a "direct threat" to the Arab monarchies across the Gulf and their strategic sites. Damascus' endorsement of the statement provoked an outcry in the Iranian press, saying Syria had "stabbed Iran in the back."

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Iran: No friction with Syria over criticism of missiles deployment

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Peru hostages, rebels sing about returning home

LIMA (R) — Hostages and rebels inside the besieged Japanese ambassador's home in Lima spent their 19th night singing songs about returning home, witnesses said. "I want to return, return, return to my home once again," they sang to a Mexican folk melody. They were clearly audible from an upper room of the residence where about 20 rebels hold 74 captives. The original words of the Mexican folk song are: "I want to return, return, return to your arms once again." Several other songs were heard from the candlelit room, including traditional Peruvian waltzes.

Hostage? Smoking or non-smoking?

LIMA (R) — Some might see it as the perfect opportunity to give up smoking: rebels take up hostage at a party, police besiege the building and when the last cigarette is gone, no one can get out to buy a fresh pack. Help is at hand, though, for nicotine addicts among the 74 hostages being held at the Japanese ambassador's residence since Dec. 17. "We are taking in cigarettes, both Western and Japanese," said International Committee of the Red Cross spokesman Ronald Bigler. "We are trying to help the hostages make it through the day, to ease their ordeal."

Havel gives up smoking and drinking

PRAGUE (R) — Czech President Vaclav Havel said he had given up smoking and drinking since surgeons removed a malignant tumour and half of his lung last month. "Fate let me see it would be good to give up so I have given up," he said in his regular radio speech, a day after marrying for the second time. "Not only have I become a non-smoker, I have even had to become a teetotaler. I hope that it will not be forever," he added in the broadcast, recorded soon after his marriage to Czech actress Dagmar Veskmova, 43, on Saturday.

Peron 'daughter' says exhumation to be set in February

ROME (R) — An Argentine woman who wants to prove she is the illegitimate daughter of late President Juan Peron said in an interview that a court would set a date in early February for the exhumation of his body. "Very soon we'll know the whole truth," Martha Holgado, 62, told Italy's La Repubblica in an interview from Buenos Aires. "The judge" has decided that in the first week of February, the day and time of the exhumation will finally be fixed. DNA tests will be carried out on the embalmed body to check whether Holgado's blood matches genetic material from Peron.

2 rare Nepalese red pandas born in zoo

AUCKLAND (R) — Tashi, a Nepalese red panda at Auckland zoo in New Zealand, gave birth to two cubs in a new year boost for the endangered species. Zoo spokeswoman Frances Valentine said the new arrivals were grey and about seven centimetres. The worldwide population of Nepalese red pandas is about 300, of which 222 are in captivity. "Through deforestation, there's no habitat left for them," Valentine said. The cubs were suckling while mother Tashi rested and father Mario displayed total indifference. "At the moment he's showing no interest. He plays a very low key role as far as parenting," Valentine said.

S. Arabia denies British nurses coerced into admitting murder

RIYADH (AFP) — Saudi Arabia denied Monday that two British nurses had been coerced into confessing to the murder of an Australian colleague at a Saudi hospital and accused the British news media of double standards.

"It's a crime of murder like any other. Nobody in our country is forced to make confessions about something they didn't do," Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef said in remarks published by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

"We have no interest in doing so," Prince Nayef was quoted as saying on the sidelines of a meeting of Arab interior ministers in Tunis.

Nurses Lucille McLauchlan and Deborah Parry, who are accused of stabbing and choking to death 53-year-old Yvonne Gifford at a hospital in

Dhahran on Dec. 11, have retracted their confessions, their Saudi lawyer said.

Ms. McLauchlan, 31, and Ms. Parry, 41, said they only confessed to murdering Gifford after being promised they would escape prosecution and be sent home if they admitted their guilt, their lawyer Salah Al Hujeilan said at the weekend.

"There is no pressure and we reject pressure. Pressure will have no impact on a question dealing with our sovereignty or whatever human being is living in the kingdom," Prince Nayef said.

The interior minister also accused the British press coverage of bias.

"Why don't they treat this case like any other taking place in the kingdom or elsewhere?" he asked.

Prince Nayef asked if the British press would have shown the same interest if a

Saudi had been killed in a Western country.

He gave a strong defence of the Saudi judicial system. "Islamic law is well placed to verify the truth of the accusations," Prince Nayef said.

Under Islamic law, judges must certify the validity of any confession.

The defendant also "must appear before a tribunal of three judges, whose verdict then passes before an appeals court, before which the defendant can list objections to the verdict," he said.

"If the appeals court upholds the verdict, it goes before the permanent body of the superior justice council, which must either uphold the verdict or send the case back to the lower court," he said.

The suspects are being held at Dammam prison in eastern Saudi Arabia.

Nahar journalist freed on bail

BEIRUT (R) — A military appeals court on Monday ordered the release on bail of Lebanese journalist Pierre Atallah, charged with contacts with Israel.

The court set bail at six million Lebanese pounds (\$3,867).

Mr. Atallah, a 34-year-old Maronite Christian sub-editor on the conservative daily Al Nahar, is the last of 48 people rounded up last month after a van carrying Syrian workers was machinegunned in a predominantly Christian area north of Beirut, killing the driver and wounding some passengers.

The court agreed to release him after increasing bail from one million pounds set on Friday by judge Riad Tailya.

The chief military prosecutor had appealed to the higher court against Mr.

Tailya's decision.

It was not immediately known whether Mr. Atallah was released as soon as the verdict was known. He is expected to be interrogated further in the coming weeks before a decision on whether to put him on trial.

All the other detainees held last month have been released, including Ghassan Bardaweel who was charged like Mr. Atallah with "disturbing Lebanon's relations with a friendly country" — a reference to Syria whose 35,000 troops in Lebanon make it the country's main power broker.

Mr. Atallah was also charged on Dec. 30 with "making contacts with Israeli enemy agents and distributing leaflets that incite soldiers against obeying orders."

5 sentenced to death in Egypt

CAIRO (AP) — Five extremists were sentenced to death Monday and 19 more received prison terms for the murders of eight police officers and two civilians in 1993.

As judge Ahmad Salahuddin Badour of the supreme state security court announced the verdicts, the defendants began to chant anti-government slogans including, "We aren't afraid of jail or execution, all we care about is Islam."

Female relatives began wailing and weeping. Seven more defendants were acquitted in the case.

Another of those charged died in a clash with the police. Eight of those tried are still at large, including two of those sentenced to death.

TEL AVIV (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he has been misjudged and unfairly criticised, especially by the media, on his progress toward delivering peace and prosperity.

"The Israeli stock market is going through the roof, but what do they know?" Mr. Netanyahu said with a tinge of sarcasm.

Speaking in an interview with the Associated Press at his Jerusalem office, Mr. Netanyahu said he was angered by critics who doubted his intentions to continue the Arab-Israeli peace process and shape up Israel's economy.

"Oh, yeah, it makes me mad, but I don't take it personally," said Mr. Netanyahu. Still, he said, "it's tough to live with it."

Mr. Netanyahu said he had been misunderstood, especially by the press.

"I have had this experience of being dismissed or discounted, and over time people see where you're leading, and they begin to understand the logic of what we're doing, even the most hostile and unfair press cannot stamp out the force of reality."

At 47, Mr. Netanyahu is the youngest prime minister in Israel's history. His credibility as a peacemaker has been under challenge since he won last May's general election by a narrow margin over the favoured Shimon Peres of the Labour Party.

Arab states chilled relations with Israel soon after he came to